



**SMALL
WORLDS**
Marja
Heikkinen

**HOMES,
INC.**
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Davies

**A BOARD
WITHOUT
A MAP**
Mathew
Walls

**THE
QUIET
EXODUS**
Virginia
Robertson

**URBAN
FRACTURES**
URBANISM
AND
HOUSING



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for 22 years

The thematic Ovi

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editorial

This time, Ovi thematic issue is titled Urban Fractures and focuses on urbanism and housing, knitting a tapestry of hard realities and human experiences.

Cities are the stage where our most pressing crises and our most hopeful solutions, collide. The articles in this issue of the Ovi eMagazine grapple with this duality, examining whether our urban future will be one of equity and resilience or of deepening division.

We are at a pivotal moment. The 15-minute city offers a seductive vision of low-carbon convenience but we must question, convenient for whom? This question echoes throughout our features. New parks and bike lanes can become tools of “greenification,” pushing out long-time residents. Meanwhile, the financialization of housing continues unabated, turning homes into assets for global capital, not neighbourhoods for community.

Our challenge is to steer transformative trends toward the public good. Can we repurpose vacant office towers into missing-middle housing, using zoning reform to legalize gentle density? Can aging suburbs reinvent themselves as inclusive “surban” hubs, and can we design “smart” infrastructure that serves, rather than surveils, citizens?



Ultimately, these are questions of power and belonging. As climate migration accelerates and the gig economy destabilizes traditional housing, the demand for a tangible Right to the City grows louder. This isn't just philosophical; it's reflected in concrete fights for community land trusts, tenant protections, and housing designed for intergenerational living, not just nuclear families.

The path forward requires bold policy, intentional design, and a relentless focus on equity. The blueprints exist. The question is whether we have the collective will to build them.

And of course like in every other issue of the thematic Ovi eMagazine, political articles, cultural news, cartoons, poems and fiction are part of the experience.

Thanos Kalamidas
Chef Editor



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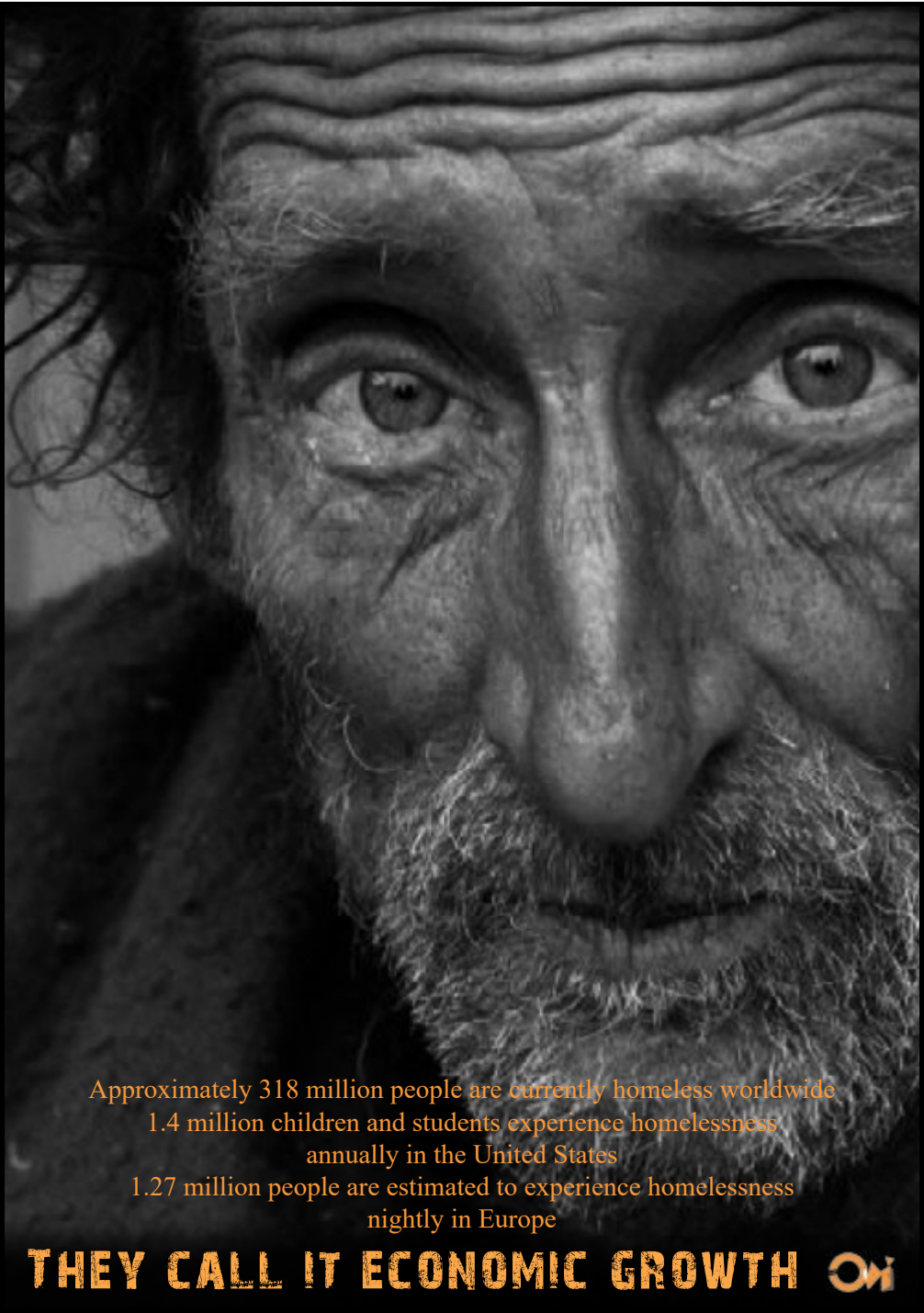
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Approximately 318 million people are currently homeless worldwide

1.4 million children and students experience homelessness
annually in the United States

1.27 million people are estimated to experience homelessness
nightly in Europe

THEY CALL IT ECONOMIC GROWTH 



The Ovi thematic
eMagazine

Urban Fractures
March 2026

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March 2026

SMALL WORLDS

BY MARJA HEIKKINEN

The 15-minute city arrives the way lifestyle concepts often do, smiling, reasonable, carrying a reusable tote bag. It promises a life in which the essential choreography of existence, work, groceries, school, the pharmacy, the café where the barista knows your order, unfolds within a quarter-hour walk or bike ride from your front door. The idea flatters our exhaustion. It suggests that the modern city, that grand machine for wasting time, might finally be tuned to human scale.

In its purest form, the concept is disarmingly humane. Fewer commutes mean fewer emissions, quieter streets, lungs less acquainted with diesel. Parents reclaim the lost hour between daycare pickup and dinner. Elderly residents stop measuring their independence in taxi receipts. Urban planners sketch neighbourhoods that resemble villages, stitched together by transit rather than torn apart by highways. It is difficult to object to a city that seems designed for actual people.

Yet the more the phrase circulates, the more it begins to sound like a luxury brand. Fifteen minutes, like “artisanal” or “organic,” risks becoming a label that describes a mood more than a material condition. It evokes cobblestones, bakeries with warm windows, children pedalling unaccompanied. It does not conjure a six-lane arterial road, a warehouse district marooned in asphalt, or an apartment complex where the nearest grocery store requires a bus transfer and a small act of faith.

The danger is not that the 15-minute city is wrong, but that it is incomplete in the way optimistic renderings always are. It treats proximity as destiny. But proximity, in cities, is expensive.

Affluent neighbourhoods already live inside the brochure. Their sidewalks are intact, their zoning codes permissive enough to allow the holy trinity of coffee shop, daycare and pilates studio. They possess the luxury of mixed use without ever having to name it. For them, the 15-minute city is not a transformation but a branding exercise, a flattering new caption under a familiar photograph.

Meanwhile, many working-class districts are still organized around distance, not nearness. Homes are clustered in one place, jobs in another, discount groceries in a third, health care somewhere else entirely. These landscapes were engineered by decades of policy that treated separation as order: residential here, industrial there, commerce somewhere convenient to cars. To retrofit such places into walkable ecosystems is not impossible, but it is slow, political, and profoundly disruptive.

The rhetoric, however, moves faster than the concrete. There is a quiet cruelty in telling people they should be able to reach everything they need in fifteen minutes, when the city they in-

habit was built to ensure they cannot. It converts structural inequality into a lifestyle choice. If you do not live well, the implication goes, perhaps you have chosen poorly, or failed to cycle enthusiastically enough.

Developers have already learned to translate the idea into square footage premiums. “Fifteen-minute living” appears in glossy brochures beside rooftop gardens and the promise of “community.” Rents rise accordingly. What begins as an argument for spatial justice drifts toward a familiar outcome: the repackaging of convenience for those who can afford it, and the slow displacement of those who made the neighborhood interesting before it was marketable.

Urban history is littered with such ironies. The park becomes a selling point; the tram line becomes a threat; the bakery becomes a symbol that your lease will not be renewed. Walkability, like waterfront views, has a habit of inflating property values faster than wages.

Defenders of the concept insist that this is a failure of implementation, not of imagination. They are right, in a narrow sense. A 15-minute city designed with rent control, social housing, aggressive public investment, and local hiring could be a machine for equity. It could scatter clinics and libraries into forgotten districts, lace industrial zones with housing, turn food deserts into something less biblical. It could insist that convenience is a public good, not a boutique amenity.

But that version of the idea requires a political temperament that is currently in short supply. It demands governments willing to interfere in land markets, to prioritize renters over speculators, to spend money where returns are measured in human stability



rather than quarterly growth. It asks cities to remember that they are not startups.

Without such muscle, the 15-minute city risks becoming another elegant diagram pinned to the wall while the actual metropolis continues its untidy sprawl. The diagram will show circles of perfect access, little halos of possibility. The map outside the planning office will still look like a patchwork of privilege and neglect.

There is also the psychological dimension, rarely mentioned in the brochures. The promise of hyper-local life flatters our longing for control. It imagines a world small enough to master, where nothing essential lies beyond the horizon of our own legs. This is comforting, particularly after years in which the planet has felt both hostile and too large to negotiate.

Yet cities draw their electricity from friction, from the encounter with strangers, from the small shock of crossing an invis-

ible border into another version of yourself. A life lived entirely within fifteen minutes risks becoming a loop, a curated aquarium of familiar faces and agreeable shops. The cosmopolitan miracle of the city is not just that you can get what you need, but that you can be surprised by what you did not know you wanted.

The ideal urban day contains inconvenience. It contains the wrong bus, the accidental conversation, the neighborhood you had no reason to visit until you did. Compressing life into a tight radius may reduce carbon, but it may also reduce the strange, inefficient encounters that make cities more than efficient service providers.

This is not an argument for misery or congestion, but for humility. Cities are not products to be optimized once and then enjoyed like a finished app. They are arguments conducted in brick and zoning codes, messy negotiations between past mistakes and future hopes. To imagine them as perfectly calibrated clocks, each citizen a tidy gear, is to misunderstand their genius.

And yet, the alternative, continuing with landscapes designed around the private car, with commutes that erode the soul one brake light at a time, is not defensible either. The 15-minute city, for all its marketing gloss, points toward a truth that should be obvious: distance is a form of inequality. Time, stolen in increments of traffic and transfers, accumulates into a quiet tax on the poor.

The challenge, then, is to rescue the idea from its own elegance.

That would mean starting not in the postcard districts but in the places that currently require an expedition for a carton of milk. It would mean building clinics before boutiques, libraries

before wine bars. It would mean accepting that some neighbourhoods will become more desirable and insisting, in advance, that their original residents have a right to enjoy that desirability rather than be evicted by it.

It would also mean speaking honestly about trade-offs. Densification is not a poetic word when you are the one losing sunlight. Mixed-use zoning is charming until the bar downstairs discovers karaoke. Localism can shade into parochialism, the suspicion of anything that does not fit the established rhythm of the block.

A serious 15-minute city would acknowledge these tensions instead of airbrushing them away. It would be less slogan, more labour.

At present, the concept floats in an ambiguous space between reform and fantasy. It is progressive enough to sound moral, vague enough to be profitable. Politicians can invoke it without committing to the tax increases or regulatory battles that would make it real. Developers can market it without promising affordability. Citizens can desire it without agreeing on who should pay for it.

In this way, the 15-minute city resembles many contemporary ideals: universally applauded, selectively applied, quietly exclusive.

The question is not whether the model is utopian or feasible. It is both, in different hands. It can be a blueprint for a gentler, lower-carbon urban life, one in which the geography of opportunity shrinks to match the reach of ordinary legs. Or it can be a velvet rope, stretched neatly around neighbourhoods that already won the historical lottery.

Which version prevails will depend less on bike lanes than on power: who controls land, who writes zoning laws, who absorbs the cost of change, who enjoys its rewards.

If the 15-minute city is to be more than a slogan, it must be willing to be unpopular in the rooms where property values are discussed. It must be prepared to distribute inconvenience upward as well as convenience downward. It must offend, occasionally, the people who are most fluent in the language of urban improvement.

Otherwise, we will continue to build small worlds for the comfortable, while the rest of the city measures its life in distances too long to walk, and in minutes that belong to someone else.

Utopia, after all, is not a place but a practice, renewed each budget cycle, each zoning hearing, each argument over whose footsteps matter. Without that repetition, the quarter hour becomes just another advertisement.





March 2026

THE HOUSES BETWEEN

BY ZAKIR HALL

There is a peculiar optical illusion that appears whenever Americans talk about housing. On one side of the street stands the detached single-family home, dutifully flying its flag and guarding its lawn like a small democratic embassy. On the other side, looming in the imagination, is the high-rise: glassy, impersonal, and always suspected of bringing traffic, shadows, and strangers who do not wave. Between these two structures lies a vast conceptual blank space, a kind of architectural Bermuda Triangle where duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, and modest walk-ups quietly vanish.

This absence is not accidental. It is legislated.

For much of the twentieth century, American cities perfected the art of outlawing the ordinary. Zoning codes, written in the sober language of safety and order, performed a sleight of hand: they preserved “neighborhood character” by banning the very buildings that once defined neighbour-

hoods. The triple-decker in Boston, the fourplex in Los Angeles, the brick walk-ups of Chicago, these became historical artefacts rather than living options. We built museums of housing and called them communities.

The result is what planners now refer to, with academic restraint, as the “Missing Middle.” It sounds like a sociological condition, perhaps a cousin to middle-child syndrome. In reality, it is a shortage so severe that it has reshaped daily life: young adults lingering in childhood bedrooms, families stacking roommates like mismatched furniture, retirees discovering that downsizing is a myth told by real estate brochures.

Housing debates often unfold as theatrical moral contests. Developers are villains. Homeowners are guardians. Renters are wanderers. Politicians perform concern the way magicians perform card tricks, quick hands, minimal results. But the Missing Middle exposes something more awkward: that our crisis is not only economic, but aesthetic, emotional, and faintly nostalgic.

Americans claim to love neighbourhoods. What they frequently mean is stasis. Zoning codes enforce a kind of architectural freeze-frame, locking vast residential districts into a single-family posture long after families themselves have diversified. The irony is almost literary. The nuclear family shrinks, fragments, recombines, and improvises, while the buildings designed to house it remain frozen in a 1950s prom photograph, smiling stiffly at a future that never arrived.

A duplex, by contrast, is not radical. It does not shout. It barely clears its throat. A triplex does not overthrow empires. A four-story apartment building does not blot out the sun. These structures do what architecture once did naturally: they absorb demograph-

ic change the way a sponge absorbs water, quietly, flexibly, without demanding a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

And yet, in many cities, constructing such buildings requires legal acrobatics worthy of a circus audition. Variances, hearings, community input sessions where microphones mysteriously malfunction, these rituals form a modern morality play in which density is cast as the antagonist and parking is the tragic hero.

Opponents of reform speak the language of concern. Traffic will worsen. Schools will overflow. Shadows will lengthen. Property values will collapse, presumably into sinkholes, taking backyard barbecues with them. What is rarely acknowledged is that these fears are less about infrastructure than about intimacy. Duplexes bring proximity. Proximity brings unpredictability. Unpredictability threatens the delicate fantasy that one's neighborhood is a curated exhibit rather than a living organism.

The movement to legalize the Missing Middle, therefore, is not merely a planning proposal. It is a cultural provocation.

To allow gentle density is to admit that cities are not museums, but conversations. Conversations are messy. They involve people one did not personally approve during a neighborhood meeting. They involve renters, immigrants, students, nurses working night shifts, and children who play too loudly at inconvenient hours. Architecture becomes the grammar of coexistence, and zoning its punctuation.

Critics often describe reformers as utopians. In truth, they are mild realists. They are not demanding skyscrapers in cul-de-sacs or bullet trains through bird sanctuaries. They are asking for buildings our grandparents would recognize without squinting.

The resistance to this modest request reveals how deeply zoning has shaped the American psyche. We have come to believe that low density is a moral achievement, as though space itself were proof of virtue. The large lot becomes a résumé. The quiet street becomes a credential. The absence of other people becomes a lifestyle brand.

But scarcity has consequences.

When cities ban modest apartments, they do not ban demand. They simply redirect it. Prices rise like stubborn dough. Commutes lengthen into epics. Teachers drive an hour to teach children who live five minutes from their schools. Nurses collapse into cars at dawn, not from exhaustion but from geography. The urban map becomes a diagram of exclusion drawn with the delicate ink of bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, the single-family house shoulders a burden it was never designed to carry. It must be starter home, forever home, retirement plan, emotional milestone, and speculative asset. No object should be asked to perform so many psychological tasks. No wonder it is cracking under the weight.

The Missing Middle offers a different story. Not a dramatic one. Not a story of instant affordability or perfect equity. But a story of options. A young couple might rent a small apartment without surrendering the possibility of staying in their neighborhood. An aging parent might move into the unit upstairs instead of across the state. A teacher might live near her classroom, a bartender near his bar, a child near her grandmother.

These are not utopian fantasies. They are mundane miracles, the sort cities used to produce without thinking too hard about it.

Of course, reform is uneven. Some cities have begun to legalize duplexes citywide, or remove minimum parking requirements that quietly sabotage small projects. Others cling to their zoning maps like family heirlooms, yellowed and treated with sentimental reverence. Each reform sparks lawsuits, recall campaigns, and editorials predicting apocalypse in the form of three-story buildings.

The debate often collapses into numbers: units built, rents stabilized, percentages reduced. These metrics matter. But they miss the emotional architecture of the problem. The true cost of the Missing Middle is not only measured in dollars, but in a thinning of urban relationships.

When only the wealthy can afford space, cities become galleries of isolation. When only towers and mansions are legal, daily life polarizes into altitude and acreage. The middle disappears not only from buildings, but from social imagination.

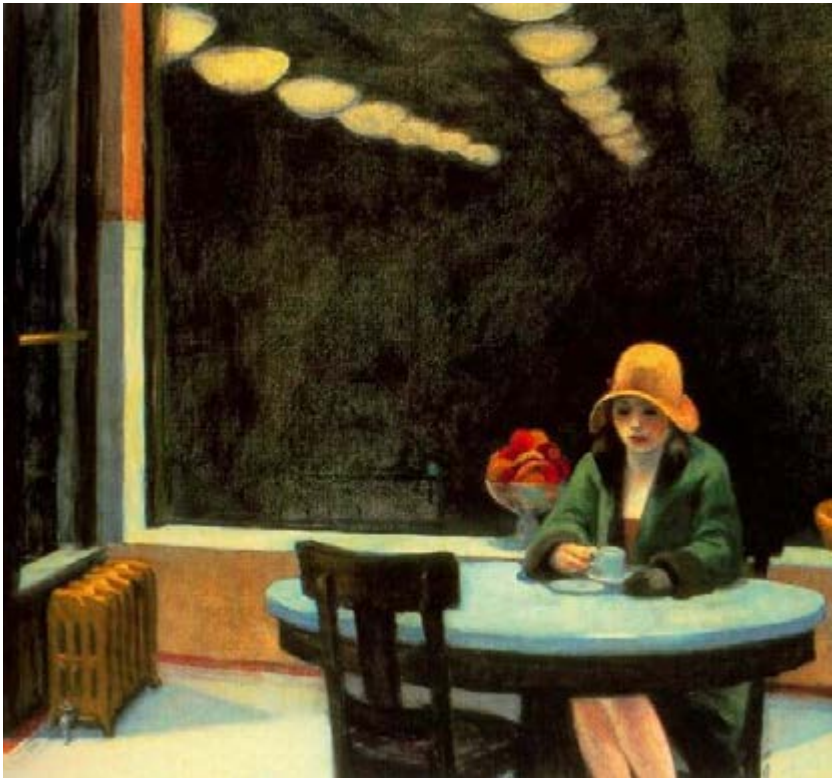
Legalizing modest density is, at heart, an act of civic humility. It concedes that no generation owns a neighborhood outright. That streets are borrowed, not possessed. That the future will arrive regardless of how firmly we clutch our setback requirements.

There is something quietly radical about allowing a building that does not perform ideological theater. A triplex does not announce a vision. It simply houses people. In an era of loud solutions and louder fears, this modesty feels almost subversive.

Perhaps that is why the Missing Middle frightens us. It lacks spectacle. It promises no dramatic salvation, only the slow, unglamorous repair of urban fabric. It suggests that the housing crisis might be eased not by heroic megaprojects, but by a thousand small permissions written into municipal code.

The revolution, if it comes, will not arrive in steel and glass. It will arrive disguised as a slightly larger house next door, one with three mailboxes instead of one.

And someday, when we are older and more tired of arguing, we may discover that what we feared was not density, but the idea that our cities might belong to people other than ourselves.





A BOX IS NOT A HOME STILL FOR SOME IS RESIDENCE

*HELP THE HOMELESS
EVERY ACT OF KINDNESS COUNTS
DONATE AND ALWAYS SHOW
RESPECT AND KINDNESS.*

OVER FORTY YEARS IN A DOORWAY

BY THANOS KALAMIDAS

Homelessness has been staging a long occupation of our cities longer than some of the buildings that now loom over it. For more than forty years tents have become an unofficial architectural style, shopping carts a mode of transportation, sidewalks a shared bedroom. We have grown so used to this that we no longer register its strangeness. A person sleeping in a doorway barely interrupts the rhythm of the morning commute. They are a fixed object now, like a mailbox or a fire hydrant. This is what endurance looks like when it belongs to a failure.

We tell ourselves stories to make this tolerable. We say homelessness is complicated, which is true but also convenient. Complicated means slow. Complicated means nobody is quite responsible. Complicated means the crisis can be managed, discussed, budgeted, piloted, rebranded, and postponed indefinitely. Over the decades, homelessness has evolved from a social emergency into a perma-



nent feature of the urban landscape, like traffic or pigeons. We plan around it. We step over it. We have stopped being shocked by it.

The contemporary housing crisis has not created homelessness but it has refined it, industrialized it, given it a broader customer base. It has taken what was once a fringe condition, associated in the public imagination with mental illness, addiction or bad luck and stretched it into the middle of ordinary life. Teachers live in vans. Nurses couch-surf. Families rotate between motels with the loyalty programs of business travellers. The crisis has gone up-scale in all the wrong ways.

Rent now behaves like a dare. It rises not because wages do, or because buildings improve but because it can. Housing has become less a place to live than a financial instrument with windows. Apartments are no longer homes first and investments second; they are spreadsheets with plumbing. The result is a quiet, relentless gravity pulling people downward. You do not fall into homelessness anymore. You slide.

Cities respond the way institutions always do when they cannot solve a problem but must be seen addressing it: they manage appearances. Encampments are swept, not solved. People are moved along like inconvenient furniture. A tent disappears, and the problem is declared temporarily invisible. It reappears three blocks away, obediently, like a recurring rash. This is called progress.

The language we use betrays us. We talk about “the homeless” as if referring to a separate species, nocturnal and migratory. The phrase is neat, grammatical and profoundly misleading. It implies a permanent identity rather than a temporary condition, though

for many, temporary has lasted decades. We do not say “the jobless” or “the widowed” with the same cold finality. Homelessness, in our syntax, becomes destiny.

What forty years of this has taught us is not how to fix the problem, but how to live alongside it without feeling much. Compassion fatigue has become a civic virtue. You are expected to care, but not too loudly, not too effectively, and certainly not at the expense of property values. Outrage is permitted only in small doses, like seasoning. Too much ruins the dish.



The housing crisis intensifies this moral numbness. When everyone is struggling, sympathy becomes competitive. The housed poor look at the unhoused poor and think, with quiet terror, There but for the grace of my landlord go I. It is hard to organize politically when you are busy calculating how many late fees equal eviction. Survival is an excellent distraction from solidarity.

We also cling to the fantasy that homelessness is a personal failure rather than a policy choice. This is comforting. It suggests the system is basically sound, merely misused by unfortunate individuals who lack discipline, ambition, or moral hygiene. If homelessness were truly structural, we would have to admit that the sidewalk sleeper is not an exception but a preview.

The contemporary economy rewards ownership and punishes existence. To exist indoors now requires proof of worth: credit

scores, background checks, deposits that rival small ransoms. To be poor is not just to lack money but to lack credibility. You must audition for shelter. Fail the audition, and the city becomes your studio apartment.

Meanwhile, luxury buildings rise like glass sermons to a different religion, one in which scarcity is holy and vacancy is profitable. Apartments sit empty as investments mature, while people sleep in doorways beneath them. This arrangement is so perverse it would be funny if it were not so well lit.

We argue endlessly about whether to build more housing, as though shelter were a philosophical position rather than a biological need. We debate zoning with the intensity once reserved for war. Neighbourhoods mobilize to protect their “character,” as if human beings were a kind of noise pollution. The homeless are accused of lowering property values, never of exposing the values already in place.

After forty years, the real scandal is not that homelessness persists but that it has been normalized. Children grow up learning which blocks to avoid, which bodies to step around. They absorb the lesson that society has a visible floor, and falling through it is not rare. It is simply inconvenient to witness.

The housing crisis adds a new chapter to this lesson: the floor is not stable. It wobbles. It cracks. You can do everything right, study, work, save, avoid catastrophe and still find yourself one rent increase away from becoming part of the scenery.

We are told this is the price of a dynamic economy, of growth, of freedom. But freedom that requires some people to live in tents so others can speculate in peace is a peculiar definition. Growth

that produces more doorways than beds is not a triumph of engineering but a failure of imagination.

An opinion, then, unfashionable but unavoidable: homelessness is not an accident. It is an outcome. It is the visible edge of a system that treats housing as a commodity first and a human necessity second. The contemporary housing crisis merely sharpens the outline of a decision made decades ago, that the market knows best, even when it leaves people outside in winter.

Forty years is long enough to call this what it is: not a temporary emergency, not a complicated puzzle, but a moral habit. We have practiced it daily, refined our excuses, adjusted our expectations downward. We have learned how to look without seeing.

The tragedy is not only the lives narrowed to sidewalks and shelters. It is the broader shrinking of our sense of obligation to one another. A city that can tolerate mass homelessness for forty years can tolerate almost anything. It becomes flexible in all the wrong places.

Someday, perhaps, we will study this era the way we study old photographs of polluted rivers or factories full of child labourers, marvelling at what was once considered normal. We will ask how people could walk past such suffering on their way to lunch. The answer, uncomfortable and accurate, will be that lunch was expensive, rent was due, and looking away had become a kind of muscle memory.

Until then, the tents will remain. The rents will rise. The doorways will stay occupied. And we will continue rehearsing our astonishment at a problem we have spent forty years carefully deciding not to solve.





March 2026

ZOHRAN'S GAMBLE, HOUSING HOPE IN A CITY OF HIGH STAKES

BY ROBERT PEREZ

New York City is no stranger to political theater but there's something in the air that feels a little different this time. Zohran Mamdani, the city's newly minted mayor, is stepping into office with a clarity of purpose that New Yorkers rarely see, housing. Not just the endless chatter about "affordable units" or "rent stabilization" that policymakers recite like a mantra, but a theory of housing justice that could redefine the city or at least, he hopes, make it a livable place for those who keep it alive. Yet, as any native New Yorker knows, hope alone doesn't pay the rent, and theory rarely survives its first collision with the brick-and-mortar world of property developers, global capital and entrenched bureaucracy.

Mamdani's platform leans heavily into what some might call the politics of practicality masquerading as idealism. He talks about limiting the influence of mega-landlords, expanding truly affordable housing stock, and rethinking zoning laws to accommodate the city's swelling population. To hear him tell it, the housing problem isn't just a local inconvenience; it's a moral failing of civic governance, a flaw baked into the very DNA of American urban life. This framing is audacious, especially in a city where the housing market has been treated like a casino for decades. But here's the thing: it might just be the audacity that's needed.

Critics, of course, are quick to roll their eyes. "Theory is one thing," they say, "implementation is quite another." And they're right. You can stand in a council chamber and decry the inequities of a system skewed toward profit, but once you step outside into the wild of Manhattan's real estate ecosystem, you realize you're negotiating with forces that don't play by idealistic rules. Landlords with portfolios spanning the globe, financial institutions that treat apartments like liquid assets, and a state apparatus accustomed to laissez-faire intervention all stand between ambition and reality. For Mamdani, the question isn't whether his theory is morally compelling, it's whether it can survive a meeting with the machinery of the city.

There's also the global dimension to consider. New York is hardly unique in its housing plight. Cities from London to Hong Kong to São Paulo are grappling with the same impossible arithmetic: high demand, scarce space, skyrocketing costs and a population increasingly priced out of its own neighborhoods. The problem is not just local; it is transnational. If Mamdani's ideas are to resonate beyond the five boroughs, they must confront the structural realities that connect urban housing markets around

the globe. Foreign investors treat housing as an asset class, not a community resource. Governments are slow to intervene in ways that challenge entrenched financial interests. And yet, New York's experiments, if they succeed, could ripple outward, offering a blueprint for cities similarly strangled by speculation and neglect.



But what does success look like? Is it merely the construction of more units, or something more radical, a reimagining of how a city distributes its wealth and power? Mamdani hints at the latter, pushing the idea that housing is a right, not a privilege, and that civic institutions have a responsibility to assert that right against market forces. This is a dangerous position politically; it invites comparisons to the socialist models some Americans still reflexively fear. Yet, in practical terms, it is a conversation New York has skirted for too long. The city's housing stock has been treated as an investment playground, while the people who live in its apartments are left to navigate an alphabet soup of subsidies, rent controls, and bureaucratic loopholes. Mamdani's theory, at least, confronts this head-on.

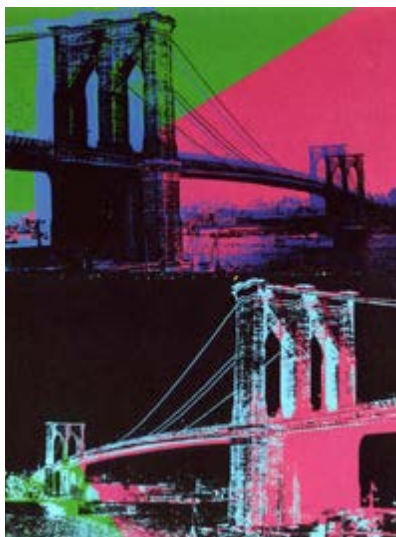
The challenge, of course, is translation. Policy is nothing if it cannot be executed. New York's governance is famously labyrinthine, and the mayor's office can often feel more ceremonial than operational. Passing laws to regulate mega-landlords or rezone neighborhoods is one thing; seeing them enforced in a city of eight million, each with their own stakes and grievances, is quite another. Moreover, the theory of housing as a right collides with the reality of the market economy. Developers demand profitability; banks demand predictability. When these forces meet an agenda built on moral imperatives rather than fiscal incentives, friction is inevitable. The real test for Mamdani will not be speeches or press conferences; it will be the quiet, painful work of negotiation, compromise, and sometimes strategic defeat.

Yet, there is reason to hope. New York has always been a city that reinvents itself under pressure. The urban landscape is littered with the detritus of failed experiments, yes, but also with remarkable successes, public housing projects that defied the odds, zoning reforms that reshaped neighborhoods, grassroots movements that changed policy from the ground up. Mamdani's approach is in some ways a natural extension of this history, a recognition that systemic problems require systemic solutions, and that the city's wealth cannot exist in isolation from the lives of its residents. The brilliance of his theory lies in its audacity: it refuses to accept that housing scarcity is immutable, and it imagines a city where public good and private interest are not inherently at odds.

Internationally, New York's experiment could offer lessons, but also cautionary tales. Cities across the globe are experimenting with their own solutions: Berlin has imposed strict rent caps; Singapore has pioneered government-owned housing; Tokyo has leveraged density and transit-oriented development to absorb

population growth. None of these approaches is perfect, and all come with trade-offs. Mamdani's challenge will be to craft a model that is both uniquely New York and globally relevant, a system that asserts rights without collapsing under economic pressures, that encourages investment without displacing communities, that balances moral ambition with administrative reality. If he succeeds, it could be a turning point not just for the city, but for metropolitan governance in an era of urban inequality.

Still, skepticism is warranted. Housing policy is the kind of issue that exposes the limits of political theory in real time. Voters expect quick results, while bureaucracies move at geological speeds. Developers and financiers will push back, and any misstep could be seized upon as evidence that idealism is incom-



patible with governance. Mamdani's genius or folly, will be measured not by the elegance of his proposals, but by their resilience in the face of relentless, practical opposition. The city is a testbed, and every day in office will be a reminder that good intentions are insufficient armor against the complexities of real-world implementation.

And yet, perhaps that is precisely why this moment feels electric. New Yorkers are accustomed to despair, to the sense that the city's problems are eternal and unchangeable. The idea that a mayor could approach housing not as a problem to manage but as a right to enforce is invigorating, even if fraught with peril.

Mamdani's theory will likely evolve, mutate, and compromise itself along the way, as all theories must when they meet reality. But the fact that it exists at all and that it is being placed at the center of city governance, is itself noteworthy. In a metropolis often defined by its failures, that counts for something.

Ultimately, the question is not whether Zohran Mamdani's theory is ready for immediate implementation, no policy of this scope ever is but whether it can galvanize a city to imagine a different kind of urban life. Housing is more than bricks and mortgages; it is dignity, stability, and the chance to belong. To test this theory is to ask whether New York can become a city that prioritizes human needs over financial ones, and whether the experiment can offer insights to other metropolises facing the same relentless pressures. If nothing else, it is a gamble worth watching: audacious, risky, and unapologetically ambitious.

New York has always been a city of contradictions: immense wealth and crushing inequality, boundless opportunity and structural barriers, towering ambition and stubborn inertia. Zohran Mamdani steps into this ecosystem with a theory that is at once idealistic and practical, moral and political, hopeful and dangerous. Whether it succeeds will be determined not in campaign speeches, but in council chambers, construction sites and the lived experiences of the city's residents. But the very act of proposing such a theory in a city that has grown accustomed to cynicism is, in itself, a quiet act of courage. And perhaps that is exactly what New York needs most, courage, daring to imagine, and the stubborn insistence that housing is not just a commodity but a right.



HOMES, INC.

BY TIMOTHY DAVIES

Once upon a time, by which I mean roughly fifteen years ago, a home was a noun. It was a place where socks went to disappear, where arguments fermented into marriages or divorces, where you learned the exact musical key of your neighbor's vacuum cleaner. A home had smells, grudges, unreliable plumbing, and a stubborn refusal to appreciate in a neat upward line.

Now a home is a verb. It “performs.” It “yields.” It “outpaces inflation.” It appears in PowerPoint decks, cropped into cheerful rectangles, annotated with words like portfolio and opportunity. Somewhere along the way, the domestic sphere was absorbed into the financial cosmos, like a small moon pulled into the orbit of a very large, very hungry planet.

This is the age of housing as asset class. Not shelter. Not stability. Not the modest human right to shut a door and exhale. Asset.

The transformation did not arrive with trumpets. It slipped in wearing the khakis of inevitability. After the financial crisis, when banks were bloated with foreclosed homes and guilt was briefly fashionable, large investment firms discovered that neighborhoods could be bought the way one buys distressed stocks: cheaply, in bulk, and with the kind of emotional detachment usually reserved for mineral rights. Suburbs became spreadsheets. Duplexes became “units.” Entire streets were converted into what might be called human storage facilities with growth potential.

The sales pitch was elegant in its simplicity: people will always need somewhere to live, therefore rent is eternal. Gold has moods. Oil sulks. Cryptocurrency throws tantrums. But tenants? Tenants are faithful. They line up every month like pilgrims, clutching checks.

Private equity firms did not invent landlordism, of course. But they industrialized it. They gave it a customer service hotline and a legal department the size of a midwestern town. Maintenance requests became tickets. Evictions became metrics. The relationship between a person and their roof was translated into something measurable, optimizable and crucially extractable.

If this were merely a change in ownership, it might be dull, the sort of thing economists debate while the rest of us microwave leftovers. But financialization changes behavior. When housing becomes primarily a financial instrument, its purpose mutates. The point is no longer to house people well. The point is to make the number go up.

And numbers, unlike people, do not complain about mold. The arrival of short-term rental platforms poured gasoline on this new logic. They offered every apartment the seductive fantasy of

reinvention. You were no longer a tenant. You were an entrepreneur. Your spare bedroom was not a spare bedroom; it was a micro-hotel suite with exposed brick and dreams of Barcelona.

Cities were told this was charming. Cultural exchange, they said. Strangers meeting strangers over artisanal coffee. The world flattened into friendly neighbors with rolling luggage.



But friendliness scales poorly. When enough apartments become part-time hotels, the math of cities breaks. The teacher loses her apartment to a bachelor party from Belgium. The nurse competes with a listing that promises “authentic vibes” and a complimentary bottle of wine that costs less than a single hour of her labor. Buildings quietly change their population every three days, like bedsheets in a motel. Communities develop the lifespan of mayflies.

And still the numbers rise. We are told this is simply the market, that impersonal god who accepts human sacrifice in the form of rent. The market has decided, we are informed, that housing is valuable. As though it had once been considered a decorative hobby.

But markets are not weather systems. They are collections of decisions, written in legal language and enforced by polite men in suits. The financialization of housing is not gravity. It is policy, leverage, tax codes, zoning laws, and the quiet cultural agreement that if something can be monetized, it probably should be.

There is a particular cruelty in watching a city become unaffordable to the people who make it work. The barista who knows



your order. The mechanic who can identify your car by the sound of its regret. The elderly woman who feeds pigeons as if she were managing a small feathery kingdom. They become ghosts before they physically leave, replaced by a rotating cast of weekend citizens whose loyalty expires Sunday afternoon.

What replaces them is not community but liquidity. Liquidity does not join neighborhood associations. Liquidity does not complain about the school district. Liquidity does not age. It only circulates.

The defenders of this system like to speak in the soothing dialect of efficiency. Capital, they say, must flow. Assets must be optimized. Housing should be “fully utilized,” as though an empty bedroom were a moral failure, akin to hoarding oxygen.

But human life is gloriously inefficient. We keep rooms we barely use. We stay in neighborhoods long after the restaurants decline. We form attachments to sidewalks, to trees, to the exact angle of sunlight on a kitchen wall at five in the afternoon. These loyalties do not fit inside a quarterly report.

The financial model prefers flexibility. It likes tenants temporary and furniture photogenic. It favors the aesthetic of belonging over the inconvenience of actual belonging.

And so we live in cities increasingly staged for visitors and investors, not residents. Apartments are decorated for people who will never learn the names of their neighbors. Buildings glow at night like cruise ships docked permanently in someone else's childhood.

The result is not merely higher rent, though that is the headline. It is a subtler evacuation: of permanence, of intergenerational memory, of the sense that a place might still recognize you in ten years.

You begin to notice the language shift. People no longer say they are "moving." They say they are being "priced out." As if ejected by an algorithm.

The tragedy is not that homes have value. It is that value has eaten the home.

We have mistaken the map for the territory, the spreadsheet for the street. Somewhere in a glass tower, a building is performing beautifully. Somewhere else, a family is packing their lives into cardboard because the performance demanded a higher ticket price.

None of this is inevitable. It is merely profitable. We could choose differently. We could decide that housing is infrastructure, like water or electricity, too important to be left entirely to the creative whims of capital. We could design cities that reward long-term residency instead of short-term extraction. We could tax speculation until it develops a modest sense of shame. We could treat homes as places where life happens, not just where money sleeps at night.

But that would require admitting something unfashionable: that not everything valuable should behave like a stock.

Until then, the real estate listing will continue its linguistic acrobatics. Cozy will mean small. Up-and-coming will mean unaffordable by Thursday. Vibrant neighborhood will mean you will never meet the same neighbor twice.

And somewhere, a child will grow up in an apartment that no longer exists a year later, replaced by a listing with white curtains, a bowl of decorative lemons, and a nightly rate that could fund a small rebellion.

The home, once a noun, will remain a verb: to extract, to optimize, to flip.

We will continue to live inside balance sheets, paying rent to a system that does not know our names, only our credit scores.

Which is efficient.

And deeply, meticulously, inhuman.



THE ONLY HOUSE THAT ALWAYS WINS

BY SIDNEY SHELTON

In every housing crisis there is a familiar photograph, a couple standing in front of a “For Sale” sign that might as well read “Good Luck,” a young family boxed into a rental that costs more than their parents’ first mortgage, a skyline bristling with cranes building apartments no one they know can afford. The story is always told as a tragedy of scarcity, of zoning laws, of slow construction, of greedy landlords, of fickle markets. All of this is true, and all of it is incomplete.

Because every crisis also produces winners. Not accidental ones. Not marginal ones. Consistent, structural, well-dressed winners who never appear in the photograph. Banks and building societies do not merely survive housing crises. They feed on them. They are the only house that always wins.

The modern housing market is presented as a neutral arena, buyers meet sellers, prices rise and fall like tides, credit flows like weather. But banks are not part of the weather. They are the climate

system. When prices rise, they lend more. When prices fall, they tighten credit and collect more. When people are desperate, they refinance them. When people default, they repossess them. In every scenario, the meter keeps running.

A mortgage is often described as a product. This is charming, in the same way calling a shark a “fish” is charming. A mortgage is not a product in the ordinary sense; it is a long-term claim on a person’s future labor, indexed to a piece of land whose price the lender itself helps inflate. It is rent, rebranded as ownership, paid in installments to a more polite landlord.

During a housing boom, banks expand like lungs. Credit becomes generous, friendly, almost flirtatious. “You can afford more than you think,” they whisper, sliding spreadsheets across desks like romantic notes. Prices rise because credit rises. Credit rises because prices rise. The loop tightens into a knot that looks, from the outside, like prosperity.

When the knot snaps, as it inevitably does, the story becomes one of discipline and responsibility. Borrowers are told they were reckless. Governments are told to cut spending. Renters are told to wait patiently for “market corrections.” Banks are told they are too important to fail. And so they do not.

Losses are socialized with the tenderness of a lullaby. Bailouts arrive wearing the language of stability. Central banks flood markets with cheap money. Regulations are rewritten in the careful handwriting of people who lunch together. A crisis that empties kitchens and fractures marriages becomes, inside financial institutions, a line item problem. A difficult quarter. A strategic adjustment.

What is called “risk” in banking culture is rarely existential. It is narrative risk. Reputational risk. The risk of smaller bonuses. The system itself is built to absorb their falls like a memory-foam mattress absorbs a tired executive.

For everyone else, housing is gravity. It determines where you can work, who your children befriend, how long you commute, how much you sleep, how anxious your Sundays feel. It decides whether illness becomes catastrophe, whether divorce becomes homelessness, whether old age is quiet or panicked.

For banks, housing is a spreadsheet. Building societies, with their gentler name and heritage font, are not exempt from this logic. Mutual ownership softens the language but not the arithmetic. They, too, profit from the permanent condition of “not enough homes” and “too much demand.” They, too, expand their balance sheets on the backs of people who have been taught that renting is failure and owning is virtue.

The housing crisis is often framed as a shortage of buildings. But it is just as much a surplus of finance. We have perfected the machinery for lending money far more than the machinery for building decent, affordable places to live. It is easier to create a complex mortgage-backed security than a well-insulated apartment near a bus line.

Banks do not build homes. They build leverage. They make money when people buy, when people sell, when people refinance, when people default, and when governments panic. The only truly dangerous scenario is not a crash or a boom but stability, low prices, modest profits, slow growth, people who own their homes outright and borrow little.

That would be a crisis. So instability is not an unfortunate by-product of the system. It is a feature. A mild fever keeps the patient dependent on medicine. A chronic shortage keeps wages obedient. A permanently anxious middle class makes excellent customers.



Consider the strange emotional choreography of housing advice. Young people are urged to “get on the ladder” as though shelter were an Olympic event. They are told to stretch themselves thin, to borrow at the edge of nausea, because prices will “only go up.” When prices do go up, the same institutions congratulate themselves on their prudence and innovation.

If prices fall, the moral language reverses. Borrowers should have been cautious. They should have read the fine print. They should have understood interest rate risk, inflation risk, liquidity risk, the geopolitical risk of distant wars altering bond yields.

It is remarkable how often “personal responsibility” appears only after profits have been privatized.

The defenders of the system will say that banks provide liquidity, that they enable home ownership, that without them the market would freeze into a medieval barter of bricks and promises. This is true in the way it is true that oxygen enables fire. Necessary, yes. Innocent, no.

Banks do not merely participate in the housing market; they curate it. They decide who is “creditworthy,” which neighborhoods are “risky,” which lives deserve a future and which deserve a security deposit the size of a small ransom. Their algorithms quietly redraw cities. Their interest rates sculpt family sizes.

They have become unelected urban planners with better suits. Meanwhile, renters fund this architecture of inequality without even the courtesy of equity. Rent payments march upward with military discipline, untethered from wages, tethered only to the ambitions of lenders and landlords. A generation learns to live with roommates like a chronic condition, to postpone children like an indulgence, to treat stability as a luxury item.

Banks, of course, have products for that too. What would a housing system look like if it were designed primarily for living rather than lending? It is an almost radical question now, like asking what food would look like if nutrition mattered more than packaging. It would involve boring things: public housing that is actually public, long-term fixed rents, limits on speculative ownership, credit as a tool rather than a religion.

It would involve banks being smaller, duller, less heroic in their quarterly earnings calls. Which is precisely why it does not happen.

The tragedy of the housing crisis is not that it exists. Markets

misfire. Cities grow awkwardly. People move. The tragedy is that it has become normalized as background noise, like traffic or bad weather, while the beneficiaries speak the language of inevitability.

Banks do not lobby for affordable housing because affordable housing cures the disease they profit from. They do not campaign for wage growth that outpaces house prices. They do not design products that make themselves unnecessary.

They design products that make leaving impossible. And so the crisis continues, politely, professionally, indefinitely. Couples pose for photographs in front of “For Sale” signs. Families scroll listings like mourners reading obituaries. Politicians promise reforms that arrive pre-compromised. And banks and building societies publish earnings reports that suggest, gently but firmly, that everything is going according to plan.

The only house that always wins is not made of brick or wood or hope. It is made of contracts, compounding interest, and the quiet assumption that shelter is best managed as a financial instrument.

It does not have a front door. It has a balance sheet.



CITIES OF DUST AND DREAMS OF CONCRETE

BY EZE OGBU

There is a particular kind of silence that lives in abandoned farmland. It is not the romantic hush of nature reclaiming old stones, but the brittle quiet of things left unfinished: irrigation pipes dry as bones, a roofless toolshed leaning like a tired man, a well whose bucket has forgotten the weight of water. Across large parts of Africa, this silence is spreading. It is the sound of people leaving.

They are not leaving because they hate the land. Many still love it fiercely, the way one loves a difficult parent. They are leaving because the land no longer argues back in good faith. The rains arrive late or all at once. Seeds cost more than faith can justify. Markets lie an expensive journey away and middlemen skim profits like cream from thin milk. Farming, once the default rhythm of life, has become an act of stubborn defiance. And defiance does not feed children reliably.

So the young board buses with cracked windows. They ride motorcycles balanced with plastic bags of clothes. They walk, sometimes for days, toward cities whose names glitter like coins in the mouth, Lagos, Nairobi, Accra, Kinshasa, Addis Ababa. The city promises work, or at least motion. It promises electricity, which is a form of hope that hums.

What it rarely promises but often delivers, is a careful plan. Africa is urbanizing faster than almost any other region on Earth, but it is doing so the way a body grows during a fever: rapidly, unevenly, without coordination between the limbs. Cities stretch outward like spilled ink. Informal neighbourhoods rise overnight, built from optimism, scrap metal, prayer, and geometry learned on the spot. Streets appear where feet insist on walking. Drainage is negotiated with gravity. Law arrives later, if at all.

This is not merely a technical failure of zoning committees and sleepy ministries. It is a philosophical failure, a confusion about what progress is supposed to look like.

For decades, the countryside was treated as a waiting room for the city, a place people were expected to outgrow. Governments spoke the language of agriculture while funding the poetry of concrete. Budgets leaned toward highways that led into capitals, not toward feeder roads that might have dignified rural life. Schools trained children to escape their villages, not to remake them. To succeed was to leave.

Now we are surprised that they listened. The tragedy is not urban growth itself. Cities are magnificent human inventions, dense with argument, invention, romance, danger, fried food and accidental philosophy. The tragedy is growth without intention. When millions arrive in a place that has prepared for thousands,

the result is not a city; it is a negotiation between survival and exhaustion.

You can see it in the morning choreography of informal settlements: women queuing for water before dawn as if auditioning for a role in endurance, men ironing shirts with charcoal irons for jobs that may not exist by noon, children learning the mathematics of traffic before they learn the mathematics of fractions. These are not scenes of failure. They are scenes of heroism. But heroism should be optional, not required for breakfast.



Meanwhile, the land empties. Fields become speculative real estate for goats. Knowledge evaporates: when to plant sorghum after deceptive rains, how to rotate crops so the soil does not become a tired storyteller repeating the same poor ending, which insects are enemies and which are misunderstood allies. These skills do not migrate easily. They are heavy with context. They belong to place.

When agriculture weakens, countries become polite beggars in the global food market, buying back calories they once grew with their own hands. Prices rise. Diets shrink into starch. Malnutrition learns new disguises. The city, fed by imported grain, stands on a countryside it has quietly starved.

There is a cruel circularity to this. Rural neglect pushes people into cities. Unplanned cities strain governments. Strained governments have even less patience for rural investment. The land, watching from a distance, learns to expect nothing.

Urban planners will tell you about infrastructure deficits, housing backlogs, transportation bottlenecks. Economists will mention productivity curves and labour mobility. All true. But beneath these phrases lives a more intimate wound, the feeling, shared by millions that dignity is now an urban address.

In villages, dignity used to grow next to the maize. It lived in knowing how to coax food from stubborn soil, in being needed during harvest, in belonging to a rhythm older than any constitution. Today, dignity wears an ID badge. It stands in line at a construction site. It sells phone chargers from a cardboard box. It survives, but it does not settle.

Uncontrolled urbanism does not only produce slums. It produces a particular psychology: restless, provisional, allergic to roots. When life is temporary, responsibility becomes theoretical. Why fix a drainage ditch in a neighborhood you may be forced to leave? Why plant trees when rent is a rumour? Why vote, when the city itself feels like a rumour that forgot to become permanent?

And yet, people continue to come. Of course they do. Hunger is a persuasive speaker. So is ambition.

The question is not how to stop them. That would be both immoral and impossible. The question is how to make staying a serious option again, and how to make cities something more than crowded apologies.

This would require a political imagination that treats rural life not as a museum exhibit or a nostalgic inconvenience, but as a strategic foundation. It would require roads that respect villages, credit systems that understand farmers are entrepreneurs with muddy shoes, technology that serves crops as elegantly as it serves banks. It would require schools that teach children how to code and how to compost, how to design apps and how to read clouds.

It would also require cities to grow with humility: to admit that chaos is not culture, that informality should be a stage, not a destination, that planning is not colonial nostalgia but collective self-respect.

Africa does not suffer from too many cities. It suffers from too few believable futures outside them.

Until the land becomes once again a place where ambition can breathe, people will continue to trade soil for sidewalks. They will build lives in unfinished neighbourhoods, naming their children after hope and their streets after absence. The countryside will grow quieter. The cities will grow louder. And somewhere between the two, a continent will keep asking itself a question it already knows the answer to:

What does development mean, if it leaves the land behind? For now, the buses keep leaving at dawn. The fields keep waiting. And the cities, swelling like restless hearts, keep promising everything except rest. ■

MUTANT CITIES

The City Among the Graves

In Zimbabwe's capital, Harare a desperate shortage of residential land has led to the ultimate breakdown of a long-held taboo: living among the dead. In areas like Epworth and Hopley, families have built their homes within the boundaries of cemeteries, transforming sacred ground into bustling residential zones .

The boundary between the world of the living and the dead has blurred entirely. Children play on tombstones, using them as playground equipment without fear. Residents plant vegetable gardens and the pumpkin leaves, as one woman noted, creep and spread without regard for the graves they cover . Local authorities warn they are running out of space for new burials, not just because the living need land, but because the cemeteries themselves have been claimed as places to live. This story challenges our fundamental notions of sacred space and shows how the relentless pressure of urban growth can redraw the most intimate lines of human culture.

The Hidden Cost of Invisibility

A bizarre and tragic discovery near Bangkok reveals a darker side of urbanization in Asia. When a man named Nattapon lost his phone, the stranger who found it used the device to take photos of his surroundings. When Nattapon retrieved his phone, he was horrified to find images of a human skeleton in a derelict building .

The remains were identified as Mr. La, a migrant who had left his rural village in Lampang Province over a year earlier to find work in the bustling capital. He died alone and unnoticed in an abandoned building, a place that was regularly visited by scrap collectors, yet no one had reported him missing . His story is a chilling testament to how rapidly growing cities can create “shadow populations” individuals who are rendered invisible, existing in the cracks of the urban economy and social safety nets, their absence unnoticed in the relentless flow of city life .

The Rat as a Mirror of Change

In the city of Hamburg, a writer observes the changing face of his neighborhood through an unlikely lens: its rats. He documents three scenes that are as strange as they are revealing. First, a rat methodically cleans out a shuttered fast-food joint, performing a “job” of urban renewal one scrap at a time. Next, a rat scurries past a crowd of sacked workers watching the demolition of a historic department store, a fleeting symbol of an economic era coming to an end .

Finally, and most surreal of all, a mangy, sick rat limps out in front of a church during a guided tour. Far from being horrified,

the tourists are delighted, snapping photos of the “friendly” rat as a quirky souvenir of their trip, much to the chagrin of their tour guide . Through these encounters, the rat becomes an unexpected barometer of urban change—a cleaner of ruins, a witness to economic collapse, and even an unwitting performer in the theatre of gentrification and tourism.

The Underground Dreamers

In the harsh desert of South Australia lies Coober Pedy, a town where the solution to extreme heat is to go underground. What began as an opal mining boom town in 1915 has evolved into a permanent community where about 60% of the population lives in excavated homes called “dugouts” .

These are not mere caves; they are fully-fledged underground homes with kitchens, bedrooms, and even churches, offering a constant, cool refuge from the 113°F (45°C) heat above . But the true strangeness lies in the town’s enduring ethos. It remains a place where fortune is quite literally buried in the walls; one resident has spent 20 years mining for opals directly from his own home, referring to it as “my own bank.” The town’s existence is a surreal blend of suburban life and speculative mining, where the line between a living room and a prospector’s claim simply doesn’t exist .

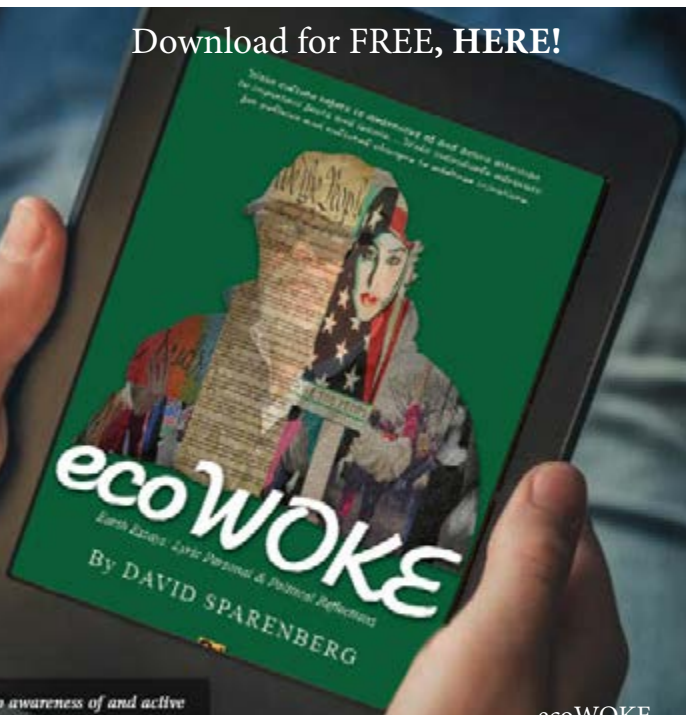
The Man Who Refused to Die

During the first devastating wave of COVID-19 in 2020, the remote Amazonian city of Iquitos became a nightmarish landscape. Cut off by road, with a collapsed health system and a black market for medical oxygen, the city’s poor were dying in droves.

The morgues overflowed, and a mass grave was secretly dug in the jungle .

It was in this context that a story emerged that seemed too surreal to be true. Juan Pablo Vaquero was taken to a hospital with COVID-19. His family was told he had died. Three days later, he appeared at his sister's door, his clothes filthy and reeking of death. He claimed he had woken up in a pile of corpses, dumped in the mass grave . Dismissed by the city's elite as an “urban myth,” the story of “Uncle Covid” became a powerful symbol of resilience and survival for the poor. It laid bare the “cannibal capitalism” that traded in life itself, and stood as a haunting metaphor for a system that not only kills but, like the virus, refuses to die. ■

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Woke culture refers to awareness of and active attention to important facts and issues. ... Woke individuals advocate for policies and cultural changes to address injustices.

ecoWOKE
by David Sparenburg



March 2026

THE COMING NEIGHBOURS

BY EMMA SCHNEIDER

The future is not arriving evenly. It is arriving with luggage. For decades, climate change has been narrated as a problem of vanishing places, coastlines dissolving into the sea, farms turning to powder, towns evacuated under orange skies. But the more disruptive story is not where people are leaving; it is where they are going. The age of climate migration is no longer a speculative footnote in academic journals. It is becoming a zoning problem.

Coastal and Sunbelt metropolises, Miami, Houston, Phoenix, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Tampa, are quietly preparing to become cities of second arrival. Some will receive people escaping wildfire corridors, others drought, others storms that now come with the confidence of bureaucrats. The question is not whether this migration will happen, but whether it will be planned with the care of an urban symphony or the chaos of a fire drill.

City governments like to speak in the language of resilience. It is a comforting word, suggesting yoga mats and reinforced seawalls, a civic flexibility that bends but does not break. Yet resilience planning has mostly focused on protecting existing residents, elevating roads, burying power lines, building heat shelters, redesigning storm drains so they resemble minor works of hydraulic art. These are necessary. They are also insufficient. A city that can survive climate stress but cannot absorb new people is merely a well-defended museum.

Infrastructure is the most honest diary of urban intention. Roads, water systems, transit lines, and electrical grids reveal what a city believes about its own future. In many Sunbelt cities, that belief remains rooted in an older fantasy: infinite growth without infinite responsibility. Phoenix, for example, continues to build outward like a mirage that believes in itself. Miami installs pumps while luxury towers multiply in zones already rehearsing their underwater monologues.

To prepare for climate migration is to accept a socially awkward truth: growth will not be polite. It will not ask permission. It will arrive unevenly, stressing hospitals in August, school districts in October, and water systems always. Cities serious about the coming influx are beginning to talk less about expansion and more about density, not the glamorous kind that sells condos, but the stubborn, practical kind that allows teachers, nurses, delivery drivers, and newly displaced families to live somewhere other than their cars.

Housing policy, in this story, is destiny disguised as paperwork. At present, most American cities are structured to welcome wealth and resist people. Zoning codes guard single-family neighbourhoods like heirloom recipes. Multifamily buildings are

treated as invasive species. Even progressive municipalities perform an annual ritual of lamenting housing shortages while defending the very regulations that manufacture them.

Climate migration will make this contradiction theatrical. When a family leaves a flood-prone parish in Louisiana or a fire-scarred valley in Northern California, they will not arrive with a developer's portfolio. They will arrive needing rent they can pay and schools that still believe in textbooks. If cities respond by building only "resilient luxury," they will convert a humanitarian shift into an aesthetic upgrade.

Some planners argue for "receiving zones" neighbourhoods deliberately designed to absorb new populations, with mid-rise housing, transit access, clinics, and public space scaled for crowding that is dignified rather than desperate. It is a humane idea. It is also politically radioactive. No district likes to be told it will become the vestibule of history.





Managed retreat is the most delicate phrase in the climate lexicon. It means admitting that certain places will be abandoned with the calmness of a doctor delivering bad news in a voice designed to sound like hope. But retreat on one coast implies advance on another. Every evacuated town is a future pressure point in some other city's planning department.

The politics of this are already curdling. Local leaders speak reverently about compassion while campaigning on the ancient promise to keep neighbourhoods "unchanged." Voters demand climate action, then sue to prevent apartments from casting shadows on their azaleas. The result is a kind of municipal schizophrenia: emergency preparedness combined with demographic denial.

There is also the quiet fear that climate migrants will not be culturally neutral. They will bring accents, voting habits, cuisines, grievances, and expectations. Cities that have marketed them-

selves as lifestyle brands “clean,” “safe,” “curated” are not psychologically prepared to become destinations of necessity. A city of choice behaves differently than a city of refuge.

Yet there are early experiments worth noticing. Some coastal cities are integrating climate projections into transit planning, assuming future populations that are larger, poorer, and more dependent on public systems than current residents. Others are revising building codes to allow modular housing that can be erected quickly, imperfectly, and cheaply, architecture as triage. A few are even coordinating with rural regions expected to depopulate, sketching a bureaucratic choreography of exit and entry that resembles a socially conscious game of musical chairs.

Still, most preparation remains cosmetic. We fortify airports before schools. We protect financial districts before trailer parks. We talk about “climate-proofing” cities as if weather were a software update.

The deeper challenge is moral geometry: how to expand without hardening, how to grow without turning growth into a privilege.

Climate migration will test the civic myths Americans cherish about mobility as freedom. In reality, many will move not because they seek opportunity but because opportunity has combusted. They will be economic refugees in a country allergic to the term.

Sunbelt cities in particular face a paradox. They are themselves vulnerable, to heat, to water scarcity, to hurricanes rehearsing new choreography each season. Preparing to receive climate migrants while quietly becoming climate migrants-in-waiting is a bit like renovating a house during an earthquake. Yet migration

rarely moves in straight lines; it pools in places that still feel familiar enough to risk.

Which is why the “climate-proof city” is a misleading phrase. No city is climate-proof. Some will simply fail more politely.

The better ambition is not invulnerability but absorptive capacity: the ability to take in shock, people, and contradiction without fracturing into gated islands and asphalt archipelagos. That capacity is built not with seawalls alone but with boring heroics, updated zoning, funded transit, universal cooling centers, water rights negotiated like peace treaties, and political leaders willing to explain that compassion requires inconvenience.

In the coming decades, the most important question for American cities will not be how high they build their barriers, but how wide they open their doors.

We are used to thinking of migration as an external pressure, a storm system on the horizon. Climate migration will be internal, intimate, unfolding on familiar highways with familiar license plates. It will be the great domestic movement of our time, a slow procession that rewrites the demographics of cul-de-sacs and school cafeterias.

The cities that prepare only for weather will be surprised by people. The cities that prepare for people may yet discover a new definition of resilience: not the ability to remain unchanged, but the courage to become crowded.

And perhaps that is the most radical infrastructure project of all, to redesign our urban imagination so that newcomers are not treated as damage, but as evidence that the city still works. ■

HOMELES

BY PATRICK MCWADE



THE HOLLOW CORE

BY HOWARD MORTON

At noon, the lights are on in the office tower across the street from my apartment but nobody is home. The building still hums, air-conditioning breathes, elevators sigh, a lone security guard leans into his phone like a man waiting for weather but the desks are empty, the conference rooms immaculate in their abandonment. It is a cathedral after the religion has moved out.

Downtowns were once our most elaborate act of collective faith. We dressed in suits, commuted like pilgrims, and gathered daily to worship productivity beneath fluorescent suns. Then came the pandemic, a mass revelation conducted in sweatpants, the gods did not require our physical presence. Work, it turned out, could happen on couches. Slack replaced the water cooler. Zoom became the new corner office. And the towers, those steel-and-glass confidence statements, were left blinking like machines that missed the memo.

Now cities face a choice that feels architectural but is really philosophical. Do we turn these empty monoliths into homes? Or do we allow them to become what some planners have begun to mutter about, only half-jokingly: vertical blight?

On paper, the solution sounds seductively simple. There is a housing shortage. There is an office surplus. Insert A into B. Problem solved. But buildings, like people, resist career changes late in life. Office towers were engineered for a different species: workers who tolerate windowless cubicles, shallow floor plates, and bathrooms designed for brief encounters rather than long baths and existential reflection.

Apartments want light the way sunflowers do. They want windows that open, walls that keep secrets, plumbing that allows for ambitious domestic rituals involving pasta and regret. Many office buildings offer instead a deep, fluorescent cave where daylight is a rumor and fresh air an expensive upgrade. To carve livable homes from these spaces is not renovation; it is architectural taxidermy, stuffing a new animal into the skin of the old.

Then there is the matter of money, which, unlike optimism, is always in short supply. Conversion costs often rival or exceed new construction. Stripping out HVAC systems built for armies of accountants. Re-routing plumbing vertically through concrete slabs that were never meant to be perforated. Installing kitchens where once there were copy machines. Investors do the math and experience a feeling familiar to anyone who has tried to justify a third espresso: mild panic.

Office buildings, especially the glossy ones from the late twentieth century, were financed on the assumption that corporations would always crave proximity and prestige. That debt still sits

there, a ghost haunting the balance sheet. To convert the building is to admit the original dream is dead, which is emotionally difficult for humans and financially inconvenient for banks. Writing down a tower's value feels like confessing that gravity has been repealed.

Cities, meanwhile, move at the speed of municipal molasses. Zoning codes were written in a time when “remote work” sounded like a punishment involving Alaska. Residential use in central business districts is often restricted, or allowed only after a pilgrimage through committees, hearings, and public comment sessions where someone will inevitably argue that renters are a threat to the moral fabric of sandwich shops.

Building codes, too, have opinions. They care deeply about the width of stairwells and the emotional safety of smoke. A tower that once passed muster as a workplace may fail the test of domesticity by inches. The result is a Kafkaesque dance: a structure physically capable of sheltering humans is legally prohibited from doing so comfortably.

And yet, the alternative is worse. An empty building does not stay neutral for long. It becomes a rumor, then a warning, then a magnet for everything a city prefers to outsource to the suburbs: vandalism, mildew, small tragedies. Multiply that by twenty towers and you have not a skyline but a dental X-ray, a mouth full of expensive cavities.

Downtowns thrive on friction, the accidental shoulder bumps, the spontaneous coffee, the argument overheard on a bench that becomes a short story. Offices provided that friction in bulk. Without them, central business districts risk becoming stage sets, impressive façades hiding nothing but echoes.

Some cities already flirt with this future. Streets that once pulsed at lunch hour now doze like retirees. Restaurants close early. The man who sold newspapers has retired or been algorithmically replaced. At night, the towers glow like abandoned aquariums, full of light but no fish.



There is a moral argument for conversion that urban planners rarely make aloud because it sounds sentimental. People should live where life already happened. Cities were not meant to be eight-hour experiences. They were meant to be habitats.

Imagine, for a moment, a tower re-inhabited not by corporate departments but by families, loners, students, people who argue with their plants. The lobby becomes less marble mausoleum and more communal living room. The coffee shop downstairs stops closing at two. The dry cleaner learns new gossip. The city exhales.

But to reach this vision, someone must agree to lose money first. Banks must accept that yesterday's valuation was a fantasy

novel. Politicians must risk angering the invisible constituency of zoning traditionalists. Developers must bet that people will want to live in buildings originally designed to house spreadsheets.

This is where opinion becomes unavoidable: if we do not subsidize this transition, aggressively and unapologetically, we will pay for it anyway, in decay, in lost tax revenue, in downtowns that feel like the aftermath of a party that ended years ago but never got cleaned up.

Critics call subsidies distortions. They are right, but so was the original distortion that pretended every ambitious adult wanted to commute forever. We subsidized highways, parking, sprawl, corner offices with views of other corner offices. We can subsidize the repair of our own mistake.

There is also a quieter danger lurking beneath the glass: inequality. If conversions do happen, they will likely favor luxury units first. The marketing brochures are already writing themselves. “Industrial chic living in the heart of the financial district.” Translation: the poor remain far away, commuting past buildings that once excluded them professionally and now exclude them domestically.

A truly civic conversion would require mandating affordability, not as a gesture but as a foundation. Otherwise, we will have replaced empty cubicles with empty rhetoric.

Some argue we should let the towers die, that cities need to shed old skins to grow new ones. This is appealing in the abstract, like advising someone else to embrace chaos. But buildings are not forests; they do not gracefully return to soil. They linger, expensive and resentful.

We are living through a rare moment when the physical map of ambition no longer matches its emotional geography. People have decided, collectively and without filling out a form, that work is not a place. Our architecture has not caught up.

The choice before us is whether we update the hardware or pretend the software glitch will resolve itself.

If we choose denial, the skyline becomes a museum of a belief system we quietly abandoned: that productivity requires posture, that seriousness requires elevators, that value is best expressed in rentable square footage at forty stories.

If we choose adaptation, the office tower becomes something less dramatic but more humane: a stack of ordinary lives, misaligned with the intentions of its original blueprints but finally useful again.

I pass the empty building every day. Sometimes I imagine the desks replaced by beds, the conference rooms by kitchens, the CEO's corner office by a child's bedroom with too many stickers. It is a modest fantasy, not nearly as glamorous as the one that built the tower in the first place.

But cities, like people, survive less on glamour than on the willingness to admit when an old dream has expired and deserves to be composted into something livable.

Otherwise, we will continue to light up the sky for nobody, maintaining vertical monuments to a work culture that quietly packed its things and left without turning off the lights.





March 2026

SMALL TREES, BIG RENTS

BY EDOARDO MORETTI

Cities have learned to speak the language of leaves. They murmur about resilience, shade equity, carbon sinks, and the spiritual necessity of bike lanes. Renderings bloom with toddlers chasing soap bubbles across meadows that do not yet exist. The vocabulary is tender, chlorophyll-heavy, and designed to calm us. But behind this soothing diction is a more abrasive grammar, price per square foot. Again and again, the same story unfolds. A park arrives. A greenway unfurls. Rain gardens stitch the curb into something almost pastoral. Then the rents follow, like a second, less photogenic species of vine, tightening itself around the stoops of people who were promised relief and receive a moving notice instead.

This is not ordinary gentrification, that blunt old word that conjures exposed brick and pour-over coffee. This is its better-dressed cousin, greenification. It comes carrying a tote bag and a spreadsheet from the urban planning department. It insists that it is doing good. And in a narrow sense, it is. Fewer

asthma attacks. Cooler sidewalks. Stormwater politely redirected into beds of sedge. The problem is not that environmental upgrades fail. The problem is that they succeed in a market that treats success as a signal to extract.

Consider how quickly nature becomes a luxury good once it is curated. A scrappy vacant lot is a sign of neglect; a designed landscape is an amenity. The distinction is not botanical but financial. The moment a space acquires a name, a logo, and a master plan, it begins to glow on real estate listings like a halo. Distance to greenery becomes a metric as important as the number of bathrooms. In this way, environmental improvement functions less like a public service and more like a speculative instrument. The trees go in and the money follows the shade.

The cruelest irony is that the neighborhoods most desperate for green investment are often the ones least able to survive it. They are hotter, louder, and more hemmed in by highways. Their residents have learned to live with the rattle of trucks and the peculiar sadness of playgrounds paved like parking lots. When a city finally intervenes, it does so with a bouquet of benefits that double as eviction notices written in botanical script. You can almost hear the municipal voiceover, breathe deeply, and please vacate within thirty days.

Defenders of this system argue that displacement is an unfortunate side effect, like soreness after physical therapy. Progress hurts, they shrug, but it is still progress. This is a peculiarly bloodless way to describe the unraveling of communities. It ignores the small architectures of belonging that do not appear in zoning maps: the neighbor who watches your kid, the corner store that extends credit without paperwork, the barber who knows which parts of your life not to ask about. When these networks dissolve,

people do not simply relocate; they are reclassified, from residents to commuters to exiles of their own routines.

Cities like to pretend that this outcome is accidental, the regrettable spill from an otherwise noble experiment. But markets are not weather systems. They are engineered. When policy makers invest millions in beautification without building equally strong walls around affordability, they are making a choice, even if they hide it under vines. The bike lane is poured in concrete; the promise of equity is scribbled in pencil.

So what would an ecological transition look like if it were genuinely designed for the people already there, rather than the ones browsing for condos? First, it would treat housing as environmental infrastructure. A tree absorbs carbon. A rent-stabilized apartment absorbs panic. Both are necessary to keep a city inhabitable. You cannot plant justice in the median strip and expect it to grow without soil made of policy, long-term rent controls, community land trusts, social housing built at a scale that does not feel apologetic.

Second, it would invert the usual order of operations. Instead of announcing a glamorous park and then scrambling to mitigate its fallout, cities could secure affordability first, publicly and loudly, the way engineers secure a bridge before letting traffic cross it. Lock in property taxes for long-term residents. Purchase land before speculators do. Make displacement legally and financially difficult, not merely embarrassing. Treat the arrival of greenery as a benefit for existing communities, not a marketing campaign aimed at future ones.

Third, equitable green policy would surrender some aesthetic control. Planners love coherence: matching benches, harmonious

signage, the subtle tyranny of a single shade of recycled plastic. But communities are messy, and their relationship to space is often improvised. A truly inclusive park might look less like a magazine spread and more like a collage: informal gardens beside formal ones, vendors where consultants imagined silence, music leaking into areas zoned for contemplation. Beauty, in this model, is not imported; it is negotiated.

There is also the matter of who gets paid. Too often, sustainability projects rely on outside firms that arrive with their own uniforms, lunch orders, and assumptions. A fairer transition would treat local residents not as beneficiaries but as employees, stewards, and decision-makers. Let the people who will live with the trees also plant them, water them, argue about them. A paycheck is a stronger anti-displacement tool than a plaque thanking the community for its patience.

None of this is as tidy as the brochures suggest. Equity is awkward. It slows things down. It requires the sort of meetings where people repeat themselves, contradict one another, and refuse to be summarized by bullet points. But democracy, like composting, is a process that looks unpleasant until you understand what it produces.

The deeper problem is philosophical. We have allowed ourselves to believe that environmentalism is a lifestyle upgrade rather than a collective survival strategy. We talk about bike lanes the way we talk about artisanal bread: as proof that a place has become desirable. In doing so, we smuggle class judgment into our climate ethics. A neighborhood without trees is framed as deficient; a neighborhood with them becomes exclusive. Nature, once the most common inheritance, is recast as a premium feature.

An equitable ecological transition would reject this framing. It would insist that clean air and quiet streets are not rewards for good economic behavior but basic urban organs, like sewers and schools. It would measure success not by rising property values but by the stubborn continuity of ordinary lives: the same families walking the same blocks, only now under shade.

This is harder to celebrate. Continuity does not photograph well. There is no ribbon-cutting for the absence of eviction. But it is the only metric that matters if cities are serious about justice. Otherwise, we will continue to build oases that operate like velvet ropes, filtering out the people who endured the desert long enough to deserve relief.

The paradox of greenification is not that nature heals and harms at the same time. It is that we have designed our cities so that healing is profitable in ways that harm. Until we disentangle environmental progress from real estate speculation, every new park will carry a quiet threat along with its benches and birdsong.

A city must choose who gets to rest in the shade.



THE SUBURBAN MYTH

BY YASH IRWIN

The first-ring suburbs were supposed to be the end of the story. After the city came the ranch house, after the ranch house came the two-car garage and after that, cultural silence broken only by leaf blowers and the distant hum of a highway. These places, wedged between the glamorous downtown and the ever-receding frontier of exurbia, were designed for settling, not evolving. They were where ambition went to rest its feet.

And yet, here they are again, tugging at the sleeve of the future. Across North America, aging suburbs built in the 1950s and 60s are undergoing an identity crisis, or perhaps an identity upgrade. Parking lots are sprouting apartment blocks. Dead malls are moulting into “town centers.” Bus lanes are being painted where Buicks once idled. Consultants have given this transformation a new name, part portmanteau, part branding exercise: the “surban” suburban, but with aspirations.

It is, depending on whom you ask, either a quiet revolution in sustainable living or gentrification with better landscaping.

The case for the surban is seductively rational. Cities are expensive, politically brittle, and physically constrained. Exurbs are carbon-belching Ponzi schemes built on the assumption of cheap gas and infinite patience. First-ring suburbs, by contrast, are already paved, plumbed, and connected. They have aging infrastructure, yes, but also wide roads, underused shopping centers, and zoning codes written in a more innocent time, when “density” was spoken in the same tone as “lice.”

Why not recycle what we already have? Urban planners, who have spent decades apologizing for the sins of postwar sprawl, now speak of “retrofitting suburbia” with a near-religious fervour. Add mid-rise housing. Insert light rail or bus rapid transit. Build a walkable core, ideally with a brewery, a yoga studio, and something de-



scribed as “artisanal.” The cul-de-sac gives way to the café patio. The lawn chair is replaced by street furniture.

On paper, it is beautiful. A kind of spatial repentance. In practice, it is complicated.

Take the parking lot. For decades it has been the great civic plaza of the suburb: empty, sunbaked, and faintly hostile, like an airport runway that forgot its planes. Now it is the site of resurrection. Developers see not asphalt but opportunity, six stories of mixed-use redemption, retail below, apartments above, all wrapped in tasteful brick.

The new residents arrive with dogs that have first names and opinions about coffee. They speak earnestly about “community” while using apps to avoid it. They bring life to places long defined by the slow choreography of turning signals. They also bring rent.

The surban, like its urban cousin, runs on density. And density runs on money.

This is where the story tilts. Sustainability is the stated goal; exclusivity is the frequent result.

In theory, building more housing, especially apartments, should relieve pressure on regional housing markets. In theory, transit should reduce car dependence and emissions. In theory, walkable centers should foster social mixing, spontaneous encounters, the urban ballet performed in sensible shoes.

In reality, many surban projects function as gated communities without the gates. The price of entry is not a code but a lease.

The new “town center” often feels less like a town and more like

a lifestyle showroom. The sidewalks are wide, the benches plentiful, the people eerily similar. There is diversity in dog breeds, but not always in incomes. The buildings are modern in that international style of muted rectangles that seems designed to offend no one and excite only real-estate photographers.

It is not that anything is wrong. It is that everything is expensive. Longtime residents, retirees on fixed incomes, families who bought in when the suburb was a promise rather than a product, watch their property taxes rise along with the skyline. Some cash out and leave. Others stay and adapt, learning to parallel park where their children once played street hockey.

They are told this is progress. And it is. But progress has a habit of being selective about whom it carries forward.

The defenders of the suburban model argue, with some justification, that stagnation is worse. Declining malls do not age gracefully. They become mausoleums for retail brands and teenage boredom. Empty lots invite nothing but weeds and municipal despair. If suburbs are to avoid becoming retirement homes for architecture, they must change.

True enough. But the question is not whether suburbs should evolve. It is for whom.

When density is driven primarily by market-rate development, affordability becomes a rumour, something discussed in planning meetings and postponed indefinitely. A handful of “workforce housing” units are sprinkled into a sea of luxury studios, like parsley on a steak.

Transit, too, is a double-edged rail. New stations increase land values. Increased land values encourage upscale development.

Upscale development politely displaces the people who most need transit in the first place.

The result is a suburb that looks urban but behaves like a country club. There is a particular irony in watching places built to escape the city rebrand themselves as versions of it, minus the unpredictability, the grit, the inconvenient poor. The surban borrows the aesthetics of urban life while editing out its moral complications.

It offers density without discomfort. Diversity without friction. Community without obligation.

This is not always intentional. Often it is the cumulative effect of zoning battles, financing structures, and political caution. It is easier to approve a sleek apartment complex than a deeply affordable one. Easier to court young professionals than to defend renters without lobbyists. Easier to celebrate bike lanes than to fight displacement. Sustainability becomes a vocabulary word, not a value system. And yet.

There are places where the experiment is working, quietly, imperfectly but genuinely. Suburbs that mandate mixed-income housing. Transit-oriented developments that reserve space for clinics, libraries, unprofitable but essential things. Town centers that host not only farmers markets but public meetings, awkward teenagers, old men arguing about buses.

These versions of the surban are less glossy and more human. They smell faintly of compromise.

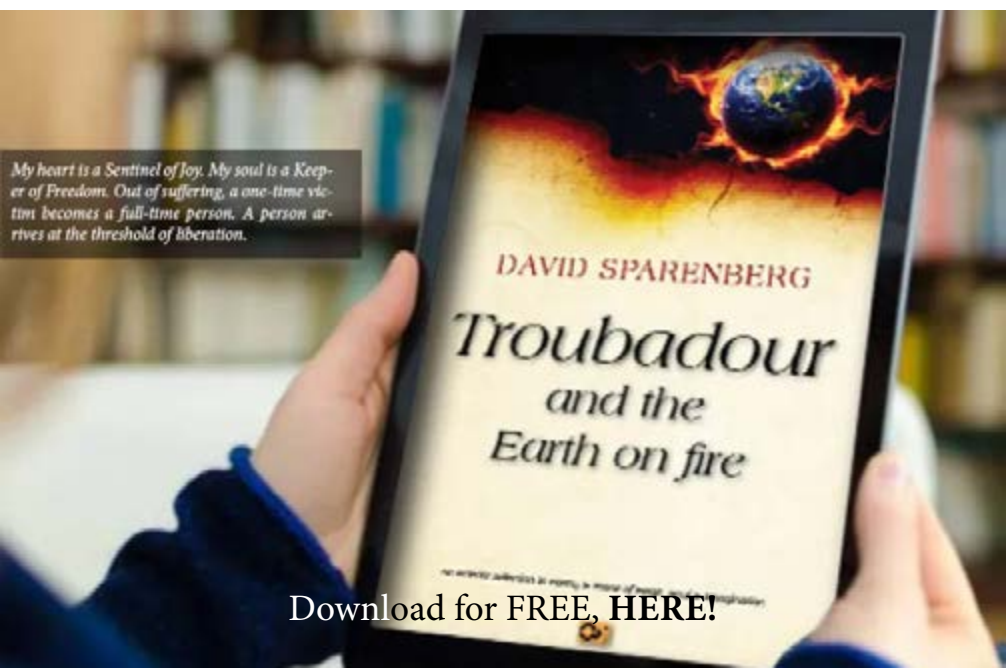
They recognize that density is not just a physical condition but a social one: the willingness to live near people who are not like you, and to let them stay.

The danger is not that suburbs will become more urban. The danger is that they will become more refined.

A refined city is a museum. A refined suburb is a brochure. The future of growth will almost certainly pass through these in-between places. The math demands it. We cannot pave our way outward forever. The climate is not amused by our commutes. The young are not impressed by our garages.

So yes, the first-ring suburbs must change. But if the suburban is to be more than a clever rebranding of inequality, if it is to be a genuine model for sustainable growth, it must make room for inconvenience. For lower profits. For people who do not match the colour palette.

Otherwise, we are not reinventing suburbia. We are simply teaching it to wear better clothes. ■





March 2026

GATED INNOVATION, GATED CITY

BY VIRGINIA ROBERTSON

In Silicon Valley the future arrives behind a glass-and-steel gate. Step onto any of the tech campuses that dot the suburban sprawl of the Bay Area and you are met with manicured lawns, private cafés, electric shuttles and a sense that the world outside these gates barely exists. Inside, innovation thrives or at least, the illusion of it does while outside, the urban fabric frays. The tech enclave has become the new model of corporate urbanism, a closed ecosystem where amenities are privatized, security is heightened, and employees are encouraged, subtly and not so subtly, to live, work, and play without ever crossing the public street. It is a model that Silicon Valley exports not just in ideas but in urban form, reshaping cities according to a singular logic: convenience, control, and brand loyalty above all else.

There is something seductive about this vision. Who would not want a world where your morning latte is delivered by an app, your lunch is subsidized, and your gym is five minutes from your

desk? For tech workers, this is a dream realized. But for the city, and for the citizenry, it is a slow-motion erosion of the public realm. Streets become bypassed corridors; parks are enclosed within corporate fences; the serendipity of shared urban life, the accidental encounter, the open plaza, the democratic cafe, is replaced by curated experiences, accessible only to those who have the right badge. This is a city in fragments, a city privatized.

The tech enclave is, in many ways, a spatial manifesto. It articulates an urban philosophy in physical form: that efficiency, security, and exclusivity matter more than social mixing, civic infrastructure, or shared public space. It is a philosophy perfectly suited to the ethos of tech itself, where metrics and algorithms replace deliberation and debate. The urban consequences, however, are far from benign. As campuses expand, so too does traffic congestion, housing scarcity, and economic displacement in the surrounding neighborhoods. The city outside the gates is left to pick up the pieces, while the campus, insulated by its walls and surveillance cameras, continues to flourish in its curated bubble.

And the irony is sharp. Tech companies champion open-source ideals, decentralized networks, and collaborative innovation, yet their physical presence is anything but open. They craft private worlds that mimic small cities, complete with dog parks and yoga studios, yet these worlds do not talk to the city, they ignore it. The knowledge economy, so often touted as a democratizing force, becomes a kind of urban apartheid, the elite insulated, the rest of the city left to navigate a landscape reshaped by the whims of the few.

Can this model be countered? The short answer is yes, but it requires both imagination and political will. Cities cannot simply hope that tech companies will spontaneously invest in the public

realm; the public realm, in this context, is the civic infrastructure of streets, plazas, libraries, and parks that sustains urban life for everyone. Countering the enclave model means asserting the primacy of the city over the campus, insisting that private interests operate within, rather than instead of, public space. It means taxing the gains from privatized amenities and directing them toward public infrastructure. It means zoning for mixed-use development, insisting that corporate campuses integrate with surrounding neighborhoods rather than walling themselves off. It means designing transit systems that are not merely private shuttles but arteries of public mobility, connecting people across income levels rather than partitioning them by badge number.



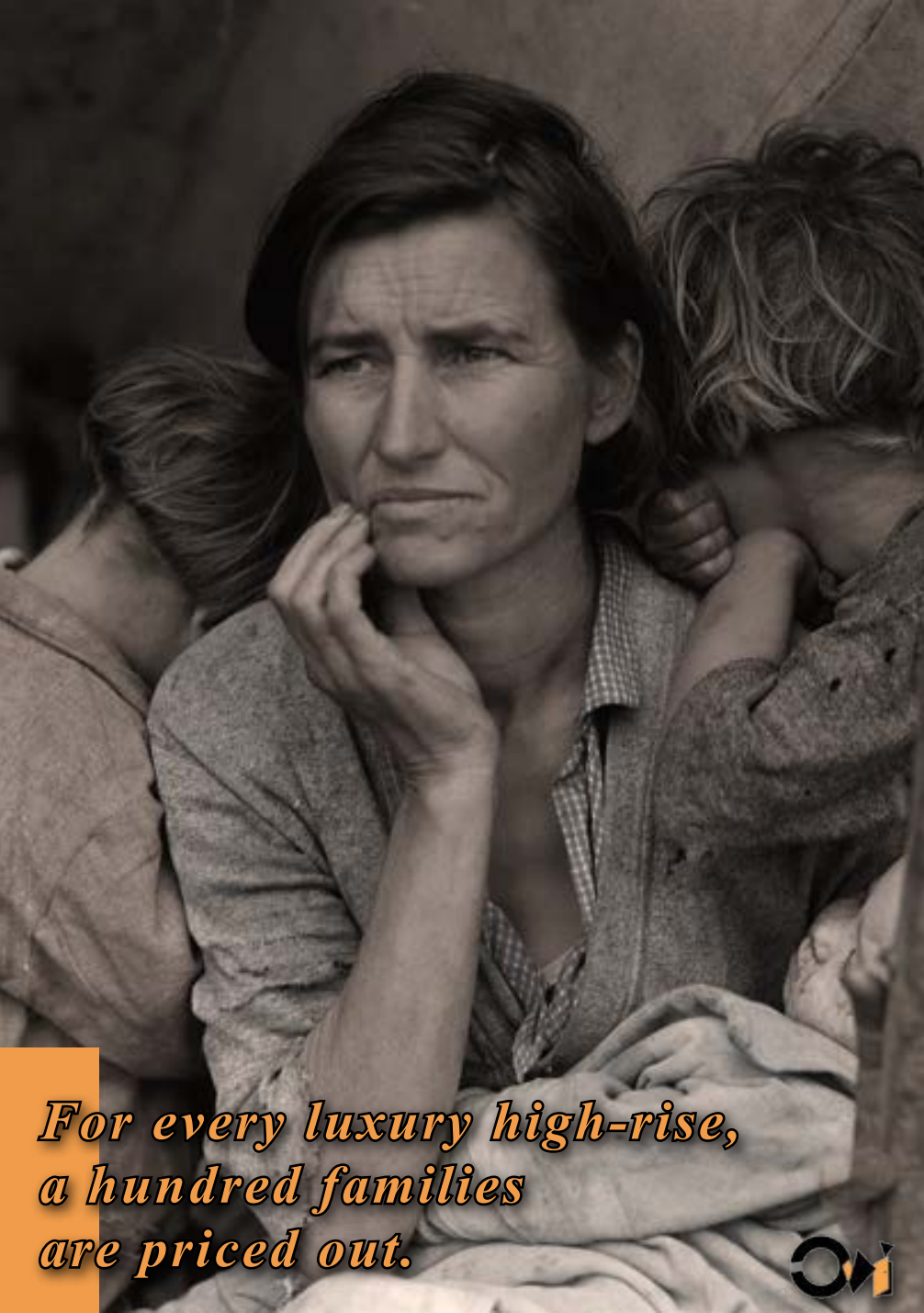
Perhaps most importantly, countering the enclave model demands a cultural shift. We must stop celebrating the tech campus as an emblem of progress and start seeing it as an urban problem with moral dimensions. A world where your office has its own police force, its own roads, its own healthcare clinics, is not a world where the city thrives, it is a world where the city is slowly hollowed out. The civic imagination must be expanded to recognize that innovation divorced from urban responsibility is not progress; it is extraction.

There is a lesson to be learned from cities that have resisted this model. Look to places where corporate development is tethered to public benefit, where new campuses are required to contribute to housing, open spaces, and transit networks. Look to urban planning that insists on permeability, walkability, and shared space, rather than privatized convenience. The fight is not against tech per se, but against a vision of urban life in which private privilege is mistaken for public good.

The allure of the tech enclave will not disappear. It is a seductive promise, wrapped in glass and fiber optics, and it will continue to shape our cities if left unchecked. But we can imagine another future: a future in which innovation and public life coexist, in which the streets are open, the parks are accessible, and the city is measured not by the gates it erects but by the connections it fosters. The choice is ours: we can let the gates multiply, or we can insist that the city remains, above all, a shared project.

In the end, the question is not whether tech can innovate, it always will but whether cities can endure the innovations that bypass them. The tech enclave is a mirror, reflecting a seductive vision of order and efficiency. But a city is not a campus. It is a messy, chaotic, endlessly shared experiment in life together. And no amount of private amenities can replace that.





*For every luxury high-rise,
a hundred families
are priced out.*





March 2026

ROOM FOR EVERYONE

BY MARKUS GIBBONS

It has become painfully clear that the house of the past, detached, uniform, strictly nuclear, was designed for a demographic that is vanishing. The postwar ideal of Mom, Dad and two kids in a tidy yard, a garage with a single car, a driveway too narrow for the chaos of real life, is crumbling under the weight of demographic reality. Grandparents live longer. Millennials struggle under the twin pressures of housing unaffordability and economic precarity. Families, when they exist in the neat nuclear shape, are less about stability than survival. The question becomes urgent, if our society is to function across generations, what sort of homes should we be building? And how do they reflect the shifting architecture of our lives?

For one, the old model of isolation is clearly untenable. The suburban home, with its echoing hallways and single-use rooms, assumes that each person in the family will operate independently, that children will grow up and leave, that the elderly will somehow fade into assisted-living invisibility.

But that's not how life happens anymore or at least, not the majority of lives. According to trends visible in cities and towns alike, multigenerational households are on the rise. Adult children are returning home, sometimes with spouses and children of their own. Seniors are staying in their homes longer, but often need subtle forms of assistance. The nuclear home cannot accommodate the rich complexity of modern life; it is a relic of convenience, designed more for real estate markets than real people.

Enter the accessory dwelling unit, or ADU, a term that sounds bureaucratic but actually represents one of the most promising solutions to our housing dilemmas. A granny flat tucked above the garage, a basement apartment with a private entrance, a small standalone cottage in the backyard, these units allow for proximity without smothering intimacy. An aging parent can maintain autonomy while remaining connected to the family. Young adults can live semi-independently, keeping financial burdens low without retreating into complete isolation. It is a design that acknowledges the inevitable ebb and flow of household membership, a recognition that life is rarely neat. And yet, ADUs remain underutilized, hampered by zoning codes, cultural skepticism, and the lingering myth of "empty nest liberation" that suggests the proper trajectory of adulthood is leaving home forever.

Beyond ADUs, we need to think more expansively about co-housing. Imagine a cluster of homes sharing a central courtyard, communal kitchens, and flexible community rooms. Residents are neighbors, yes, but also an extended family of choice. A child can wander freely and be watched by adults who are not their parents, an elderly neighbor can receive meals or medical support without leaving their home, and loneliness, a scourge among both seniors and millennials, diminishes simply because proximity fosters interaction. Co-housing challenges the fetishi-

zation of private space and asks a radical question: is the self-sovereign home truly the ideal, or is it a socially and economically impractical luxury for a shrinking minority?



Some might recoil at the idea of “integrated care facilities” as a solution, picturing sterile corridors and the hum of fluorescent lights, but this is a mischaracterization. There is enormous potential in rethinking assisted living and nursing homes not as quarantined warehouses for the elderly, but as intergenerational communities in their own right. Picture a facility where young families rent apartments, seniors maintain independent rooms, and shared amenities like gardens, workshops, and theaters foster organic encounters between generations. It is not a compromise between care and community, it is a synthesis. Care does not require segregation; autonomy does not require isolation. The walls, once thought to protect, can instead connect.

What all of these approaches share is an embrace of flexibility and imagination. We are not building homes merely to shelter bodies, but to accommodate the social, economic, and emotional needs of a population in flux. Housing is not static. A family in 2026 does not know whether it will consist of two people or six next year. It does not know whether a grandparent will become a temporary resident or a permanent one. It does not know if children will be living at home into their thirties or if a young couple will require intergenerational childcare while navigating unstable employment. Housing that cannot pivot is housing that will fail.

The beauty of multigenerational design is that it does not ask us to sacrifice modern comforts. Kitchens can be open, sunlight abundant, and privacy respected. What changes is not the quality of life, but the assumptions behind it. We start treating aging as integrated, not segregated; financial precarity as normal, not exceptional; childhood and adulthood as overlapping, not sequential. Instead of the lonely corridors of single-family homes, we can imagine hallways filled with laughter and conversation, with the occasional minor clash of generations, messy, yes, but alive.

And let's not underestimate the economic dimension. Housing affordability, especially in cities, has become a crisis of staggering proportions. Multigenerational solutions, whether ADUs, co-housing, or integrated care communities, allow families to pool resources, reduce rent burdens, and leverage intergenerational labor. Seniors contribute wisdom, supervision, and stability; younger adults contribute energy, technology, and hands-on help. It's not charity. It's survival, rendered through architecture.

Of course, challenges remain. Cultural attitudes, property law, and financing models all assume nuclear norms. Privacy concerns can be real, particularly when unrelated adults share kitchens and

bathrooms. The design must be intentional, the rules negotiated, the transitions planned. But human adaptability is remarkable. When the walls and the roofs are built to allow fluidity, people will adapt naturally.

Ultimately, housing is not just a product; it is a reflection of our society's values. If we continue to treat the elderly as separate and the young as disposable, we get the isolating sprawl of the suburban nuclear home, where people grow old in loneliness and youth in debt. If we dare to rethink design, to make space for overlapping lives, for resilience and serendipity, we create homes that honor life's messy, unpredictable flow. Intergenerational living is not a nostalgic return to extended-family households of the past, nor is it a policy prescription from on high. It is a recognition that humans, at our best, thrive not in isolation, but in proximity, proximate enough to offer help, wisdom, and laughter, yet flexible enough to respect individual autonomy.

The homes we build today will shape the way generations live or fail to live, together. It is time to design not for the nuclear family that once was, but for the fluid, interconnected family that is. Our walls should welcome, not confine. Our roofs should shelter many, not one. And perhaps, for once, the next generation of children, parents, and grandparents will grow up not under the tyranny of separation, but in the warmth of presence, of room enough for everyone.





March 2026

FUTURE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BY DR J SCOTT YOUNGER OBE

Urban development has become an increasingly more important issue in the last few decades, since the human population grew at an unprecedented rate after the 1960s as shown in Figure 1.

At the beginning of the Industrial Age in the late 18th century the world population was approaching 1 billion. A century later it was 2 billion, which was a doubling in one century, much faster than in the many centuries preceding. Come the 20th century, despite two world wars with millions of people dead, the population stood at 2.45 billion in 1946, further increased to just over 3 billion by the early 1960s and now stands at approaching 8.6 billion. An increase of 5.6 billion in some 64 years. Had the rate of growth been the same as from 1945 to 1960, the population today would be closer to 5.3 billion. The significant acceleration in growth was not realised until some two-three decades ago but was finally acknowledged in 2015 at the key climate change meeting of the UN in Paris (IPCC, 2014).

The population is forecast to reach approximately 10.2 billion by 2050, and there were several important outcomes emanating from this population expansion, which our nations' leaders were slow to appreciate. One of the outcomes concerned urban development, at a time when the distribution of peoples across the world was dramatically changing. There were many reasons for this, beyond the scope of this article, but involved medical advances, more widespread and better healthcare, improvements in agriculture leading to better food, etc., in the second part of the 20th century.

Indonesia, today the 4th most populous country, is a case in point. In 1970, the country had a population of 100 million approximately with an average longevity of 40 years. In just 30 years this had been transformed to a population of 200 million with an average longevity of 70 years. The populations of India and China, the two largest countries, had each doubled in size approximately in the last 40 years of the century, making Asia the most populous continent in the world.

The spectacular rate of growth – as the recent text of Annelie Marchsteiner announcing the GAFG forthcoming event indicated – has meant falling behind in the attendant needs of the environment and of the requirements of shelter for the expanding populace. Just in the past decade, in the UK for instance, some of the leading politicians have realised that vital attention had to be paid to providing funds for urban developments, both for existing settlements and for new. In addition, there is a greater need for energy and water, supply and sanitation, and attention to pollution in all its manifestations.

Energy and water are essential for human existence, and dealing with the requirements of existing urban infrastructure must

also be prioritised. In addition, future urban developments should also bring up potentially new ideas and materials.



The Urban Community

Cities are the oldest form of governance that have been devised by mankind with early forms going back 4000 to 5000 years, and where many of its citizens worked, relaxed and raised families. In particular, the urban communities have expanded significantly in the past century and a half, and no more so than in the last 60 years. From today's population of 8.6 billion and still growing some 7.2 billion live in or beside cities and are dependent on them, and this is expected to expand to 9 billion out of 10.5 billion by mid-century.

There is a backlog of a wide range of buildings that essentially comprise an urban environment. However, the urban area of the globe makes up only about 1.5% of the total land area of the planet, the rest of the land area, 30%, being made up of moun-

tains, hills, forested areas, and vast spaces of grassland and land for growing crops. The remaining 70% of the planet is salt water, i.e. the oceans.

Developing an Urban Environment

Table 1 (Younger & Canny, 2021) shows a comprehensive list of issues that will have to be addressed in a holistic manner in order to build a new town or city, each being important to provide a successful outcome. The list can be used to select what is needed for many of the unfinished developments that exist from the work done over the past few decades.

Table 1. Masterplan to provide a successful new urban development

- a. Provide sound and expensive fiscal arrangements for both capital works and efficiently run maintenance programmes
- a. Ensure there is adequate (30%) sustainable green and garden space for community relaxation and enjoyment
- a. Design and construct utility efficient domestic and commercial buildings; electricity, water and waste services, with reuse
- a. In viewing energy requirements, focus on maximising use of renewable energy options
- a. Consider new construction materials and techniques for a mix of both high- and low-rise structures – and reusability
- a. Provide modern hospital, medical and nursing services, with supporting inputs to take account of medical advances for sustainable healthier living

- a. Establish up-to-date education, training and supporting research facilities, noting such advances in the new cyber age (such as AI)
- a. Provide training for service industries, including tourism, both cultural and non-cultural
- a. Develop comprehensive sports and leisure facilities
- a. Design for changing transport modes, with increasing use of non-fossil propulsion – EVs, motorcycles, trucks, both driven and driverless, rail links, and allow for pedestrian and bicycle pathways
- a. Consider airport links and future expansion, and increasing use of helicopter services
- a. Where appropriate, establish supporting research facilities for food and agriculture and fisheries.



While this comprehensive list would apply to a greenfield situation, for extensions to existing urban settings the Masterplan can also be used, taking out the items that have already been addressed previously.

Naturally, it is simpler planning construction where the existing ground level is relatively flat, for instance where the elevation is closer to sea level, where many, if not most, urban centres across the world can be found. These can take time to clear all objections, the building of the new or extension to the development can proceed according to the plan.

Looking to the rest of the century

There remains much to be done in Asia, but in the coming decades increasing attention must be given to Africa where the population is expected to increase by over 2.5 billion in approximately 70 years. Africa will comprise some 40% of total world population, and Asia a somewhat similar number. This means that the rest of the world – Europe, North and South America and Australia plus the Pacific Islands - at about 20% is more thinly populated.

However, the last period of 60 years has seen the rise of the mega-city, established urban environments of greater than 10 million people, locations that have simply expanded at pace. There are centuries old places such as Delhi and Calcutta (expanding from 4.5 million in 2011 to 15.8 million today) as well as new locations such as Bangkok, Shanghai, and Jakarta, and several more, usually with locations close to the sea and ready access for trading of bulk goods across oceans. It is noted that Indonesia has an ideal geographical shape for this, being made up of many islands and thus the opportunity of building several coastal cities.

It gave one enterprising group in Jakarta to develop a plan called the 100 cities programme.

Sub-Saharan Development

There are 49 countries, either totally or partially, located in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria which will become the third largest in the world before the end of the century, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, etc, and three offshore nations, Seychelles, Mauritius and Cabo Verde. Another 5, which includes Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco north of the Sahara Desert as well the desert itself, makes the continent the second largest after Asia.

It is considered that most efforts will be on the sub-Saharan region for the remainder of the century. It is where most outside help will be needed since that is where the fastest population growth is expected to occur and much of Africa is relatively underdeveloped since the end of colonialism, during which time the emphasis was on extraction of resources and little time on developing the capability of the indigenous population.

It is assumed that initially some of the community developments, towns and cities, will form the basis of building out and expanding using today's ideas, perhaps having a masterplan to use, as shown in Table 1. One idea, that may be worth expanding is that of twinning. Here a developed country, for instance from Europe, has a treaty agreement with one African nation whereby the European country undertakes the training of personnel in the various governance and other appropriate development tasks that must be done to enable the African nation to prosper, perhaps with UN guidance. In a small way, this has been done on an environmental programme using university staff.

Concluding Remarks

In the past 60 years, the movement of people, particularly from the global south to the north, has reached significant proportions. Just in the past decade this immigration has caused some strife in certain countries, the level depending on the government of the receiving country. There must be sympathy for the people seeking a better life, particularly where they have been fleeing abject poverty or a country in turmoil/war. At the same time, there is a ‘headache’ for the receiving country, particularly when there is a shortage of adequate accommodation. The problem is worsened when the general populace does not understand the complex issue and it becomes one of a political nature. No end in sight! Therefore, actions like those of the Global Academy for Future Governance (GAFG), and its great thinkers and practitioners such as prof. Ian Banerjee and Edna dos Santos—which connect peoples, ideas, and non-traditional centres of excellence—matter greatly for the coming years.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that long-term forecasts of sustainable development nowadays are generally deemed unreliable, as most of the developments that are worthy of note take place in just a very few years (Younger & Cook, 2026).



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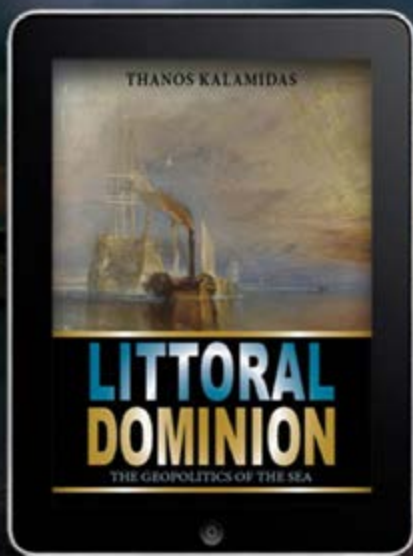
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Littoral dominion by Thanos Kalamidas

The struggle for the Salt Throne is intensifying. From the disputed shallows of the South China Sea to the warming arteries of the Arctic and the precarious chokepoints of the Middle East, the world's powers are relearning an old lesson: sovereignty is only as strong as your ability to project it across the waves.

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March 2026

THE CITY THAT CHECKS IN AND OUT

BY MARY LONG

In the early morning, the city breathes differently. The streets are quiet, punctuated only by the hum of scooters, the whirring of bicycles, the distant crackle of radio chatter from delivery drivers logging their first drops. In this half-light, these workers, men and women carrying the weight of the gig economy on their backs, become the invisible pulse of urban life. They are everywhere and nowhere at once: delivering meals, packages, a small piece of human expectation from point A to point B, yet rarely seen as full citizens of the city they animate. And this invisibility extends to where they rest, where they sleep, where they attempt the simple, often precarious act of home.

We like to call these people digital nomads, freelancers, gig workers. The labels are countless and slippery, but the conditions are almost uniform: housing insecurity, shifting schedules, and the uneasy balancing act of trying to earn enough today to exist tomorrow. They live in short-term rentals,

share cramped apartments, or exist in the elastic, semi-legal spaces of a city that is not built for their kind of mobility. And here is the question that no one seems to want to answer: do modern cities need a new form of housing, one as fluid, temporary, and yet inhabitable as the work it supports? Or will we continue to assume that these citizens of the invisible economy can simply absorb precarity as a given, like an unavoidable utility cost or a toll of urban life?

Cities, historically, were built around permanence: the brownstones of New York, the haussmannian boulevards of Paris, the terraces of London. Even in the modernist midcentury blocks, permanence was coded in bricks and mortar. Renters expected multi-year leases, mortgages promised generational tenure, neighbourhoods were curated for stability. But the 21st-century city for many is a stopover, a temporary address, a transient mailbox, a couch surf punctuated by the occasional co-living space that smells faintly of bleach and ambition. These are the places where gig workers go not because they want to, but because they must. The city has become a machine that requires their labour, but denies them the ordinary dignity of a predictable home.

Some will argue that the nomadic lifestyle is a choice. After all, digital nomads post Instagram photos from Bali or Barcelona, freelance designers boast about the flexibility of their schedule, and food-delivery apps glorify independence. But the reality behind the polished image is starkly different. The so-called freedom of the gig economy is a freedom contingent upon constant motion, perpetual availability, and exposure to market volatility that would terrify any conventional worker. If a delivery driver sleeps on a friend's couch because rent doubled, or a freelancer rents by the week in a city they barely know because their project ends tomorrow, this is not choice. It is survival.

Which brings us to the urgent, and under-discussed, question, what if the city were to acknowledge them? Not with lip service, not with token co-working hubs, not with ephemeral “flexible rentals” that exploit temporary leases to jack up rents, but with housing and services designed explicitly for a hyper-mobile population? Imagine buildings with daily, weekly, and monthly occupancy options, rooms equipped with workspaces and high-speed internet, communal kitchens, laundries, quiet corners, gyms, childcare pods, even medical clinics. Amenities are not mere perks here; they are survival infrastructure. And crucially, these spaces would need to be regulated so that they do not become a new form of rent extraction, a corporate gentrification in miniature, where “flexibility” is merely a euphemism for unpredictably high cost.

It is a delicate balance. Hyper-flexible housing can quickly slide from liberation to exploitation. There are already co-living startups that promise





community and convenience, yet charge exorbitant rates for micro-apartments with shared bathrooms, creating a market where transient workers pay more per square foot than long-term residents. The lesson of the gig economy should not be repeated in housing, just because someone is mobile does not mean they are wealthy. True flexibility would include fairness, transparency and security, an acknowledgment that a worker deserves predictability even in a temporary dwelling.

And the city, at its best, is a network of mutual dependence. Delivery drivers feed us, cleaners sustain the sanitized illusion of urban order, freelancers design the interfaces that keep us addicted to convenience, and all of them require a base from which to operate. If cities fail to provide such infrastructure, they are outsourcing precarity, we benefit from their labour while leaving them to navigate a labyrinth of unsafe leases, exorbitant rents, and overcrowded short-term accommodations.

The result is a city that works for some but lives off the exhaustion of many.

Consider the metaphor of the hotel lobby. Many gig workers' lives resemble a permanent hotel stay: check-in, check-out, transient interactions, no roots. There is a charm to this in fiction, rooms full of whispered stories, unexpected encounters but in practice, it breeds isolation, stress, and a constant negotiation with landlords and landlords' whims. We have normalized the "flexible" lifestyle in cultural discourse while ignoring its physical toll: a lack of privacy, stability, and even basic sleep. We romanticize mobility while devaluing the human need for a reliable home.

It is tempting to dismiss this issue as a side effect of progress, of technology-enabled work that allows a designer to code from Lisbon one week and Berlin the next. But dismissiveness is a luxury of the secure. For the majority, gig work is not an aspirational experiment in freedom, it is a lifeline strung precariously across the cityscape, and the housing crisis is the cord fraying at the edges. If cities do not adapt, they will perpetuate inequality, not just in wealth but in time, health, and dignity. A city that treats a portion of its workforce as invisible is, in a sense, a city that treats itself as incomplete.

So what might a humane, modern solution look like? Think of it less as a hotel and more as a hybrid of hostel, co-living space, and professional incubator. Rooms would be modular, allowing short-term rental without penalizing those who want longer stays. Communal areas would foster connection but not enforce constant interaction, recognizing the solitude many workers crave. Pricing structures could be tiered to match income levels, with subsidies for essential workers whose labour keeps the city operational. Services could include mental health resources, financial

advice, and logistics support because the invisible city should not merely house bodies, but sustain lives.

The conversation is timely. Cities across the globe are experiencing a demographic shift: more temporary residents, more freelance professionals, more gig workers. Yet urban planning, zoning codes, and housing policies are still tethered to an older paradigm, permanence as default, mobility as exception. There is an opportunity here to reimaging what it means to inhabit a city: not just as a consumer of space, but as a participant in a living, breathing ecosystem that provides not just work but shelter, not just income but dignity.

For the invisible city to emerge, it requires courage and imagination. We must confront the idea that a worker's impermanence is synonymous with expendability. Instead, we can conceive of a city that adapts, that accepts transience without abandoning accountability, that blends flexibility with fairness. Only then will the streets' early-morning hum feel less like the noise of exploitation and more like the rhythm of a city finally acknowledging all who keep it alive.

And perhaps, then, the invisible city will no longer be invisible at all. The delivery drivers, the freelancers, the nomads, they will still arrive and depart, but their presence will be recognized, their existence respected. They will have a place to rest, a place to work, a place to breathe and for once, the city will provide not just for the wealthy, the permanent, and the powerful but for those who make it function quietly, tirelessly, and often unseen.



EYES ON THE GRID

BY JERRY CARSON

There is a peculiar thrill to walking through a city that knows you, perhaps too well. A network of sensors hums quietly above your head, streetlights dim or flare at your passing, trash bins signal when they are full and your face may be cataloged in real time by an array of cameras that seem almost invisible. Welcome to the age of the “smart city,” where every utility, street, and apartment is tethered to data streams promising efficiency, convenience and security. The promise is seductive, fewer traffic jams, fewer blackouts, faster emergency response, more responsive policing. Yet as the gleaming algorithms churn behind the façade, one cannot help but ask: efficiency for whom, exactly?

In theory, smart infrastructure is the apex of civic engineering. Sensors embedded in water pipes can detect leaks before they flood an entire block; energy grids can dynamically shift power where demand spikes; predictive analytics can direct public services to neighborhoods most in need. These

innovations could be revolutionary, a literal reimagining of urban life as a finely tuned organism, capable of responding to citizens' needs with unprecedented speed.

But theory rarely survives contact with reality. In practice, smart cities are also smart panopticons. Every sensor, every camera, every data point creates a traceable map of human behavior, a map that is inevitably read not only for urban efficiency but for social control. Facial recognition, hailed as a technological marvel, is rarely neutral; its algorithms carry biases that disproportionately flag people of color, the poor, and the socially marginalized. Utility data, ostensibly collected to prevent waste, can easily morph into a tool to penalize those already struggling. Imagine a city that monitors water usage so minutely that overuse by a family in a crowded apartment triggers fines, while luxury penthouses with invisible consumption go unremarked. The line between convenience and coercion begins to blur.

Consider housing, often framed as a cornerstone of smart urban planning. Data-driven approaches can optimize occupancy, monitor maintenance, and prevent blight. Yet what is blight, and who decides it? In many smart cities, algorithms determine eligibility for housing assistance, flag homes for inspection, or even trigger evictions based on patterns of behavior deemed "risky." The tech may be framed as impartial, but the consequences are profoundly human. When a single sensor or a misread data point, can jeopardize a person's home, the question ceases to be one of efficiency and becomes one of surveillance ethics.

Policing, too, wears the smart-city veneer. Predictive crime algorithms promise to deploy officers where they are most needed, ostensibly reducing crime without overburdening communities. Yet the predictive gaze is not impartial. It often amplifies the very

inequalities it claims to solve. Communities already over-policed become further scrutinized, while neighborhoods with more political and economic leverage benefit from lighter monitoring. In effect, smart policing is not just about preventing crime; it is about reinforcing existing hierarchies under the guise of data-driven rationality. The technology is neutral in code, but its deployment is rarely neutral in practice.



Perhaps the most insidious aspect of this new urban intelligence is its invisibility. Efficiency is seductive precisely because it feels seamless. A smart thermostat learns your patterns and lowers energy bills; sensors alert authorities to potholes before they form; streetlights illuminate precisely when needed. Most citizens, immersed in the convenience, barely notice the network humming around them, let alone question who is listening, recording, or interpreting their movements. This is the quiet danger of the smart city: it masks surveillance as service, turning citizens into data points, behaviors into algorithms, and rights into footnotes.

Yet, one must tread carefully. The problem is not technology itself, it is governance, ethics, and transparency. A city that uses sensors to prevent water main failures or optimize traffic flow is

not inherently dystopian. The issue arises when these systems are deployed without oversight, consent, or accountability, when data collection shifts from service to control, and when those already marginalized are the first to feel the impact. Efficiency becomes a Trojan horse: the citizens think they are being helped, while the infrastructure is quietly watching, cataloging, and judging.

And there is something deeply political about this. In theory, smart cities should democratize access, ensuring utilities, safety, and housing respond equitably. In practice, they often entrench existing inequalities. Algorithms do not operate in a vacuum; they inherit the biases of their creators and the structures of their society. Wealthier districts may receive faster responses, cleaner streets and better-maintained utilities, while less privileged neighborhoods are monitored not for assistance but for correction. A city optimized for efficiency often ends up optimized for the privileged.

So where does this leave us, wandering through the grid with our faces mapped, our water usage monitored, and our streets calculated? Ideally, a smart city should be smart in service, not surveillance. Data should be wielded transparently, accountable to citizens, and designed to reduce inequality rather than exacerbate it. There is a subtle line between a city that anticipates our needs and a city that anticipates our behaviors for the sake of control. The former liberates; the latter constrains. The difference may be invisible until it is too late to step back.

Ultimately, smart cities are mirrors, reflecting the values of those who build and govern them. If the goal is true urban efficiency, better services, safer streets, more equitable housing, then the technology can be a powerful ally. But if the goal is management, monitoring, and control, then the same sensors and algo-

rhythms that promise convenience become instruments of coercion. The panopticon is not in the steel or the code; it is in the choices we make about how we let cities see us.

As we march further into the age of data-driven urbanism, the challenge will not be technical, it will be moral. Will we craft cities that serve citizens, or cities that serve themselves through the guise of optimization? Will we demand transparency, oversight, and fairness, or will we surrender to the seductive hum of sensors and screens, believing that efficiency is always just and convenient? The smart city is here, humming, observing, anticipating. The question is whether it is smart enough to know the difference between helping and watching, and whether we are wise enough to insist it does.



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Searching For Henri
by Richard Stanford



March 2026

CITY OF RIGHTS, CITY OF FIGHTS

BY GABRIELE SCHMITT

In the swirl of contemporary urban life, the “right to the city” has moved from the abstract musings of mid-20th-century philosophers to the frontlines of everyday struggles. Once a lofty, almost poetic demand, a call for citizens to shape the rhythms, spaces, and meaning of their cities, it now appears on tenant union posters, community land trust pamphlets, and city council agendas. Yet the journey from protest to policy is neither linear nor inevitable. It is messy, stubbornly local, and, at its best, relentlessly inventive.

The phrase “right to the city” conjures an image of a metropolis as a commons: streets, parks, housing, and culture belonging not to corporations or absentee landlords, but to those who inhabit it. It is a vision in which the city is not merely a place where people live, but where they live well, meaningfully, and with some say over the structures that shape their lives. And yet, in the 21st century, this ideal collides daily with reality: sky-high rents, in-

vestor-led gentrification, and a housing crisis that treats shelter as an investment vehicle rather than a human right.

Here is where modern housing movements have stepped into the breach. Tenant unions, once relegated to the fringes of civic imagination, have gone mainstream. They are organizing mass rent strikes, demanding transparency in housing practices, and pressuring local governments to enact eviction moratoriums. These unions transform the “right to the city” from a philosophical abstraction into a tangible claim: if you live in a city, you should not live under the constant threat of displacement. When tenants band together, negotiate with landlords, and capture public attention, they do something almost radical in its simplicity: they assert that housing is a social good, not merely a commodity.

Community land trusts offer another, quieter but equally powerful, translation of theory into practice. These trusts take land out of the speculative market, putting it in the hands of communities who then control how it is used, who lives there and at what cost. In cities where gentrification has erased cultural history block by block, land trusts act as an anchor: affordable housing that cannot be bought out by the next wave of investors, neighborhood gardens that remain green, cooperative spaces that remain accessible. It is urban permanence engineered in the face of relentless churn, a way of saying, with a bureaucratic smile, “Yes, you have a right here.”

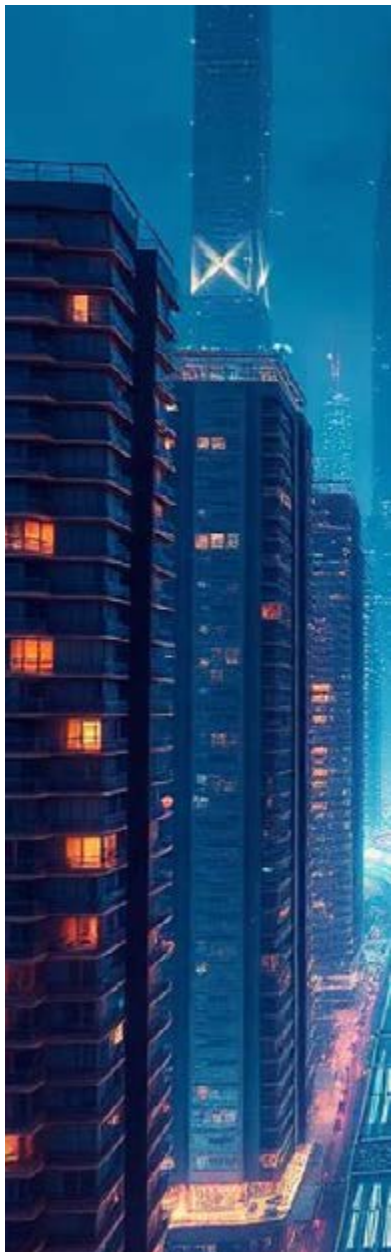
The victories are often incremental. An eviction moratorium in one city, a zoning change in another, a publicly funded social housing project breaking ground after years of advocacy, each is small in isolation. Yet together, they represent a new lexicon of urban citizenship. No longer is the right to the city merely a slogan painted on walls or chanted in protests. It has become meas-

urable, negotiable, and sometimes enforceable. This is not to suggest that the battles are won, only that they are increasingly fought with tools that work, legal pressure, municipal organizing, and the strategic mobilization of public opinion.

Eviction moratoriums, for instance, crystallize the urgency of the “right to the city” in an immediately human way. They recognize that a city cannot be democratic if people are constantly being ejected from it. They turn philosophical ideals into legal mechanisms, even if temporarily, and in doing so force a reckoning: who belongs in this city? On what terms? For how long? Tenant unions pushing for these moratoriums often report that victories like these are as much about consciousness-raising as law-making. People come to understand the city not just as a physical space, but as a network of rights, relationships, and responsibilities.

Inclusive zoning, social housing initiatives, and cooperative





ownership models are subtler interventions, often slow to bear fruit but profound in consequence. They challenge the default narrative that urban land is a financial instrument first, a home second. By mandating affordable housing in new developments or empowering communities to steward land collectively, policy begins to reflect the democratic principle that a city belongs to all of its residents, not just the ones who can pay the most. These mechanisms translate a philosophical insistence on equality into bricks and mortar, steel beams, and legal deeds. They are the slow alchemy of ideas into life, of theory into livable streets.

Yet for all their victories, these movements contend with a relentless adversary: the market. Cities, in the 21st century, are marketplaces first and communities second. Real estate speculation moves faster than legislation; luxury developments rise like monuments to profit, often in the very neighbourhoods where cultural vibrancy once

flourished. In this environment, the “right to the city” is a kind of guerrilla warfare, fought not with armies but with petitions, public campaigns, and the occasional rent strike. The philosophical underpinnings—justice, equality, collective ownership, must constantly justify themselves against the cold arithmetic of supply and demand.

The beauty of today’s housing activism is its pragmatism. While philosophy lays the foundation, activists build the structure. They understand that shouting about the right to the city is necessary but insufficient; policies must enforce it. Eviction moratoriums become lifelines, social housing becomes proof of concept, and inclusive zoning becomes a regulatory lever that prevents the wholesale displacement of entire communities. Each win, small though it may seem, is a translation of a centuries-old aspiration into something materially felt by citizens, often in the most intimate of ways, the roof over their heads.

This is also where imagination matters. The “right to the city” is not a static doctrine; it evolves with technology, demographics, and urban culture. Digital platforms enable tenants to organize across blocks and boroughs. Artists and cultural workers embed political claims into the urban landscape itself. Grassroots cooperatives experiment with creative models of ownership that defy conventional economics. In doing so, they remind us that the right to the city is as much about inhabiting the city in dignity and creativity as it is about surviving within it. It is the difference between merely existing in a city and truly belonging to it.

The lessons extend beyond individual policies. They offer a template for civic imagination: that cities can be designed not only for profit but for people, not only for investors but for inhabitants. They hint at a radical truth: the city does not have to be

a machine of exclusion. It can be a site of collective negotiation, a laboratory of democracy, a place where rights are not abstract ideals but daily lived experiences. In translating philosophy into policy, activists reveal that what was once a slogan on a protest placard “The city belongs to all of us” can, in fact, shape the way we live, eat, work and dream.

Still, the path ahead is uncertain. Market forces, political inertia, and the sheer scale of urban inequality make victories fragile. Every eviction moratorium is temporary; every social housing unit is contested; every inclusive zoning law can be undermined by loopholes. The “right to the city” remains aspirational in its fullest sense. But the shift from protest to policy demonstrates that the dream is not unmoored from reality. It is negotiable, contestable, and, increasingly, actionable.

In the end, the 21st-century city is a stage on which the philosophical and the practical collide. Tenant unions, community land trusts, and housing advocates remind us that ideas are powerful, but only when they touch lives. The right to the city, once a call to imagination, has become a call to arms, legal, political, and moral. And as these movements translate abstract ideals into concrete gains, they offer a vision of urban life that is less about exclusion and more about belonging, less about displacement and more about stewardship, less about speculation and more about home.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of this generation of urban activism is not the policies themselves, but the proof that citizens can make the city their own. That the right to the city is not a gift from above but a claim from below. That, in a metropolis of glass towers and gated enclaves, ordinary people can assert, insistently and insistently again, that the city belongs to them. That it belongs to all of us. ■



#savethechildren



JOB PRINTING

thoughts/articles



The mast marcher



MARKUS GIBBONS

On February 17, 2026, Jesse Jackson died and with him a certain unmistakable timbre in the American conscience fell quiet. Not silenced, because the echo remains, but quieted in the way a bell does when the rope is finally still. For more than half a century, Jackson was not merely present in the civil-rights struggle; he was kinetic within it, a force that refused to accept the narrow framing of justice as a regional or even national concern. He understood, earlier than most that injustice travels well. And so must those who fight it.

To call Jackson a civil-rights leader feels almost administratively insufficient. He was a translator between eras. As a young protégé of Martin Luther King Jr., he absorbed the grammar of nonviolence and the moral architecture of the Black freedom movement. But where King's cadences were sermonically soaring, Jackson's were improvisational, elastic, and deeply political. He did not inherit a movement at its moral apex; he inherited it in the aftermath of assassination, disillusionment, and fragmentation. And he chose not to mourn its lost purity but to test its adaptability.

Jackson's genius was to insist that civil rights were not a closed chapter in American history but a living, expanding claim. Through Operation PUSH and later the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, he articulated a "rainbow" long before the metaphor became fashionable shorthand for diversity. His coalition was not cosmetic. It was strategic. He understood that the margins are crowded, and that power rarely yields to solitary grievance. Farmers in Iowa, factory workers in Detroit, Black voters in Mississippi, students in California, Jackson imagined them not as separate constituencies but as overlapping witnesses to inequity.



When he ran for president in 1984 and again in 1988, he was widely dismissed as symbolic, as though symbolism were a trivial pursuit. Yet symbolism is the rehearsal for reality. Jackson's campaigns under the banner of the Democratic Party forced the party and the country, to confront the arithmetic of exclusion. He did not win the nomination but he won something arguably more durable, the normalization of Black presidential ambition. Decades before the country would elect

Barack Obama; Jackson had already mapped the terrain, endured the skepticism and endured the caricature.

He was imperfect. This must be said not as a ritual disclaimer but as a recognition of his humanity. Jackson made missteps, some

painful and public. He sometimes seemed to court the spotlight, to relish the theater of politics. But perhaps we misunderstand theater. The civil-rights movement was always partly theatrical, a choreography of marches, sit-ins and arrests designed to dramatize injustice so starkly that indifference became untenable. Jackson understood the camera as both adversary and instrument. He wielded it.

What distinguished Jackson from many domestic reformers was his insistence that civil rights did not stop at the water's edge. He traveled, negotiated, intervened. He met with adversaries and allies alike, often drawing criticism for doing so. But his internationalism was not naïveté; it was consistency. If human dignity is indivisible, then geography cannot be its limit. He saw apartheid in South Africa, authoritarianism in Latin America, and hunger in Africa not as distant tragedies but as variations on a single theme: the hoarding of power at the expense of the vulnerable.

There was something stubbornly hopeful about him. In an age increasingly defined by cynicism, where outrage is monetized and solidarity is fleeting, Jackson remained almost defiantly earnest. He believed in redemption, not just personal but structural. He believed that corporations could be pressured into fairness, that political parties could be expanded rather than abandoned, that young people could be persuaded to see themselves as heirs to unfinished work. Hope, for Jackson, was not a mood. It was a discipline.

It is tempting, in death, to canonize. We should resist that. Jackson was not a saint descending from stained glass. He was a politician in the broadest sense, a practitioner of power, negotiation, compromise, and spectacle. But perhaps that is precisely why his

legacy endures. He did not hover above the fray; he entered it. He absorbed its blows. He kept marching.

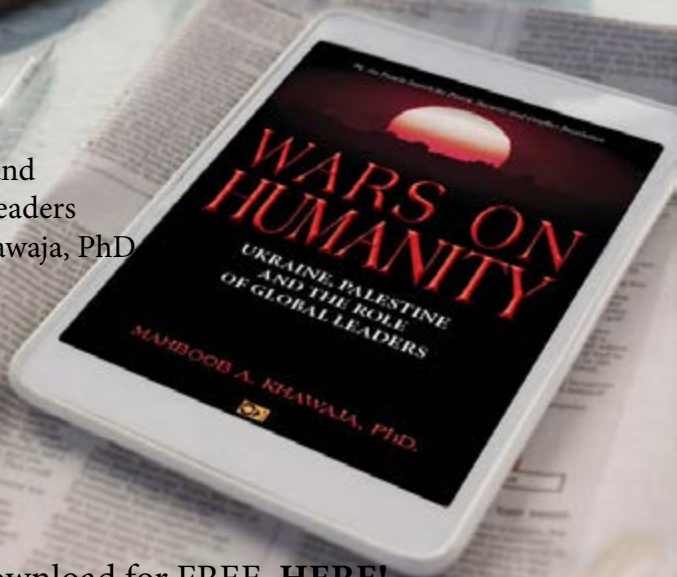
In the end, Jesse Jackson's greatest contribution may not be any single policy victory or campaign milestone. It may be the expansion of imagination. He forced America and indeed the world, to imagine a democracy capacious enough to include those it had long excluded. He argued, in speech after speech, that the arc of the moral universe does not bend on its own. It bends because hands push it.

On February 17, 2026, one of those hands went still. The work did not. ■



Wars on Humanity:
Ukraine, Palestine and
the role of Global Leaders
by Mahboob A. Khawaja, PhD

This book is a must-read for all, regardless of ideology and politics, a vital work about humanity's present and future, and that is what makes it so valuable.



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European Security Paradox and A World Without Order



MAHBOOB A. KHAWAJA, PHD.

Paradox of Time and History and the Myth of New World Order

America was not the superpower and European empires were more nationalists and aggressive when the 1857 Munich Conference held its assembly. Their delusional visions and priorities fell victim to their own vices and ruins, the consequential First World War and 2nd World War. What have Europeans learned from the past to unfold a New World Order? Paranoid, suspicious of mutual interests, devoid of rational global vision of peace and co-existence, American and European leaders continue to search for glory and triumph by military supremacy to dominate the rest of the world. Men who were universally hated and feared are alive as elected leaders propelling individualistic agendas of global hegemony and occupation. Opinions and facts of life differ as time and place do in politics.

To civilized people and nations claiming to be wise and just, the 21st century political affairs are full of contrasts and contradictions in equality of human rights, national freedom, and justice. The cult is infested with moral and intellectual corruption lacking any plausible

imagination for the good of humanity. Are we out of touch with historical facts and the impulse of Nature of Things to determine our common destiny as civilized people? The Munich Security Conference spells out competing interests and volatile visions of future-making. America First under President Trump is a novel strategy of unthinkable policies and practices. The EU and UK appear insight and place at a distant horizon.

The ethnicity of being together does not spell out cooperation and unity of purpose for how to manage the security, unproductive economy and strategic interests in the Western political sphere. Who is who? And where are the security threats coming to arrange a united front. Chinese innovation in technology and productivity dominate Western Europe and American economy. America and West Europeans are competing to agree to imaginary challenges perceived from Russia and China. The facts speak of internal gulfs within NATO and America vs. Europe. There is no insecurity except of their own self-engineered false plans to invade Greenland, occupy Canada and control the Panama Canal and extend the march to destroy Iran and the Arab Middle East. If utilitarianism was a sound societal value, France , Germany, Spain and UK's leaders appear at odds to imagine the US as a reliable partner in mutual security.

The US under President Trump and its global strategic trajectory negate the universal values of friendship, equality, human rights, freedom and justice for all. Recall Hans Morgenthau (Politics of Nations), called power politics a 'psychological sickness'. America needs more conflicts to support its war economy, not peace with its neighbors and the Arab world. Is the New World Order an hypothetical phenomenon or a convenient reality to be imagined? How do you assess its evolving substance for the future? Who would usher the New Order or would it be a re-making of historical belligerency by despotic rulers against the

people? Who would the new kings, new emperors and new rulers of the 21st century and beyond world? Flamboyant proclamations of an imaginary world of power defies the logic of the present time and place of order. H.G.Wells, the British author, tried to redefine “new world order” as a synonym for the establishment of a technocratic world state and of a planned economy, garnering popularity in state so-



cialist circles. Some authoritarianism- lords, emperors and nobles stemmed from the 16th century European Renaissance although knowledge, science and intellectual awakening were the products of new manifestations. The so-called Western democratic culture of superior power is shortsighted and naive. Enlightened and people-oriented leaders hold visions for change and sustainable future-making, not greed or egoistic insanity to quell law, freedom, justice and global peace. Do Epstein files expose a wide range of corrupt Western political cultures, obscenity, abuse of innocent young women and politically charged deep rooted societal problems? Are there effective laws and systems of legal justice, better human values and moral standards to rethink and punish those responsible for the insane crimes?

Western Culture of Thinking are in Crisis

The NATO apparatus is in crisis on security, war in Ukraine, Greenland and the divide between Europe and America. The

US needs a navigational change but is entrapped in chaos. After WW2, states and nations professed binding commitments to hold the Charter of the UNO and “save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” Not so, those pioneering the evolutionary Charter went astray to invade other nations and indulge in crimes against humanity, aggression and genocide. Historically, leaders and nations claiming to be the most powerful on earth violate the Laws of God and come closer to an end of their time and history. The Earth was meant to sustain life for all sanctity of human values and universal brotherhood. Imperialists time and again broke the covenants and victimized other nations in Asia, the Arab world and Africa. What a contrast, what a tragedy those responsible to shield global values turned out to be aggressors, hangmen and criminals under International Law.

When Western history wills, tragic history happens. Wars, colonization, aggression and military occupation are all distinct historical milestones of authoritarian leadership. Machiavelli’s Prince relives to unleash tragic tensions of time and history – the endless echo flows from the same myriad of supremacy, hatred and psychology of political maneuvering to control people and thinking minds. To wake -up informed mankind of the 21st century, and beyond you have a new World Order overshadowing all encompassed universal proclamations, charters, Magna Carta, nobility of rational thinking, collective consensus of time and history – it is a new beginning of unthinkable dark future.

Global Peace, Life and Earth are No More Sacred to be Protected

Do cultures and civilizations grow out of the moral mire of bombardment, cruelty, killing, conquest, occupation and destruction of humanity? Impostors and people of violent hidden

agendas are fast moving into power politics. Life and facts make us understand of critical thinking as truth, time and space vary across human consciousness. Undeniably, America and the EU remained not just weapon suppliers but supporters of Israeli policies and practices of crimes against humanity and genocide in Palestine. They were an integral part of violations of all norms of international law and sanctity of life. Global governance is fast becoming lawless, lacking intuition of order and power in all institutions of peace and security. Insanity amassed across the US political mind to wipe out the Palestine national identity and provoke another war on Iran just like the Venezuelan war stunt. America, the EU and Israel would strive to maintain a culture of continuous war and conflict-making and conflict-keeping for their economic interests and their own survival. They have terrorized the people of Palestine and are embarking on a new war against Iran and the Arab world.

God created the Heavens and the Earth as a Trust to fulfill human aspirations and to allow human generations to flourish since time immemorial. It was never meant to be bombed and destroyed by sheer ignorance and wickedness. The Earth, a creation of God, exists, serves His purpose equally to all creations of God, and floats in the universe without any pillars. It clarifies now and will do the same on the Day of Judgment – Day of Truth: O’ People, the Chief Creation of God! You appear to be adapted to intellect, fortitude, and fortune, being a victim of ignorance, superstition, and arrogance against me, your Mother Earth. I am not a property of any nations, states, geography, or corporations, but a Divine hub of life beyond human imagination, survival, and trust. Those bombing and destroying me are mentally sick and defy the Divine Truth. Their hearts beat, and they breathe oxygen on me and exhibit petty behaviors in politics as scum floating on a torrent. Sketch out your genius: I am a living being, spinning

at 1670 km per hour to orbit the Sun at 107,000 km per hour. Imagine if this spinning were to stall; what consequences could occur for all the living beings on Earth?

In every ideal, there is truth, soul, time and facts of history. We, The People, We The Humanity feel an awakening call of time and history to hold Western leaders accountable for their crimes, treachery, violation of human rights, freedom and justice as the foundation of civilized cultures, laws and sustainable future-making. All international institutions are broken and deliberately kept dysfunctional. Truth is one and unchanging, as it was centuries earlier. The emerging wars and destruction of Earth and human habitats are blatant violations of the trust between humanity and the Creator, calling for an awakening of human conscience and soul. ■



Dr. Mahboob A. Khawaja specializes in international affairs-global security, peace and conflict resolution and has spent several academic years across the Russian-Ukrainian and Central Asian regions knowing the people, diverse cultures of thinking and political governance and a keen interest in Islamic-Western comparative cultures and civilizations, and author of several publications including: *Global Humanity and Remaking of Peace, Security and Conflict Resolution for the 21st Century and Beyond*, Barnes and Noble Press, USA, 2025 <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/global-humanity-and-remaking-of-peace-security-and-conflict-resolution-for-the-21st-century-and-beyond-mahboob-a-khawaja/1147150197> and *We, The People in Search of Global Peace, Security and Conflict Resolution*. KDP-Amazon.com, 05/2025 <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0F6V6CH5W>

A board without a map



MATHEW WALLS

The White House is planning a leaders' meeting for the Gaza "Board of Peace" on February 19. The name alone feels like a parody drafted by someone who has never watched a war from the inside of a bombed apartment or read the minutes of history with anything resembling humility. "Board of Peace" suggests clipboards, seating charts, bottled water, administrative calm applied to a place that has been methodically unmade. It is the kind of phrase that hopes language itself can anesthetize reality.

According to U.S. officials and diplomats, the gathering will bring together powerful men to discuss the future of Gaza. None of them are Gazans. None of them were elected by Gazans. None of them will return to Gaza when the meeting adjourns, when the doors close, when the communiqués are released in that familiar, bloodless dialect of "frameworks" and "pathways." They will return instead to motorcades, secure compounds and the soothing abstraction of distance.

There is something almost antique about the idea, imperial councils deciding the fate of a territory whose people exist only as a "problem" to be solved. It recalls

an earlier era of mapmaking, when borders were drawn with rulers by men who would never cross them on foot. The difference, now, is that this process is live-streamed through headlines and press briefings, wrapped in the vocabulary of diplomacy and sold as pragmatism.



Most striking, if anything still qualifies as striking, is the possible presence of Benjamin Netanyahu as a legitimate architect of Gaza's future. This is not irony; it is something darker. Netanyahu is not a neutral stakeholder. He is not a distant observer. He is the leader most direct-

ly associated with the devastation of Gaza as it currently exists, the flattened neighborhoods, the hospitals reduced to rubble, the families erased into statistics. To invite him to a "Board of Peace" is to invite the arsonist to chair the fire safety committee and then to praise him for his experience with flames.

The moral inversion is staggering but familiar. Power has a remarkable ability to launder responsibility. Once enough suits are in the room, culpability dissolves into consensus. War becomes "context." Civilian deaths become "complexity." Accountability becomes "unhelpful at this stage." The dead, meanwhile, remain inconveniently dead.

The United States, hosting this gathering, plays its usual role as both referee and sponsor, insisting on its indispensability while

quietly shaping the outcome. Washington has long mastered this choreography: concern expressed in public, leverage exercised in private and astonishment afterward when nothing fundamentally changes. The meeting will be framed as necessary, unavoidable, the only realistic option. Alternatives, namely, listening to Palestinians themselves, will be dismissed as naïve or impractical, as if democracy is a luxury item reserved for stable climates.

What is being decided in Washington is not merely Gaza's reconstruction or governance. It is the more basic question of whether Palestinians are allowed to be political subjects at all or whether they remain permanent objects of international management. The very existence of a "Board of Peace" implies that peace is something granted downward, not built upward; something administered, not lived.

There is also the quiet, unsettling admiration embedded in the guest list. Trump's fondness for authoritarians is not an aesthetic quirk; it is a worldview. Strongmen, in this vision, are efficient. They make decisions without the nuisance of dissent. They deliver clarity, even if that clarity comes soaked in blood. The problem, of course, is that efficiency without justice is merely brutality with better scheduling.

Netanyahu fits seamlessly into this pantheon, not despite Gaza's ruins but because of them. In a political culture that increasingly mistakes force for strength, destruction is rebranded as resolve. Civilian suffering becomes collateral evidence of seriousness. The ruins of Gaza, then, are not a disqualification; they are his résumé.

Absent from this meeting will be the voices that matter most: the parents who have buried children, the doctors who performed

amputations without anesthesia, the journalists who documented their own cities disappearing behind them. Their exclusion is not an oversight; it is the premise. Genuine Palestinian participation would disrupt the narrative. It would insist on rights instead of arrangements, justice instead of stability, memory instead of amnesia.

And amnesia is essential here. For the “Board of Peace” to function, it must forget how Gaza arrived at this point. It must treat devastation as a natural disaster rather than a human decision. It must speak of the future as if the past were negotiable, optional or simply too inconvenient to mention.

The tragedy is not only that this meeting will likely fail to deliver peace. It is that it will succeed in normalizing its absence. Another summit, another declaration, another cycle in which power congratulates itself for engagement while sidestepping responsibility.

Peace, real peace, is never born in rooms where the victims are uninvited and the perpetrators are rebranded as partners. What will be decided on February 19 is not Gaza’s future. That future is being deferred, once again, to a later date, one that Palestinians are perpetually told to wait for, quietly, patiently and preferably off-camera. ■



Carney's Double Standard: Lofty Principles at the Podium, Quiet Submission in Practice



JAVED AKBAR

In January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Mark Carney delivered what many hailed as a defining address. He spoke of a fractured world order, of resilience amid geopolitical turbulence, and of the responsibility of middle powers to anchor global stability in law and principle. The speech was polished, thoughtful, and met with a rare standing ovation. Across political and financial circles around the globe, it was praised as courageous and visionary.

Weeks later, that vision lies in stark contradiction with his conduct.

On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched a coordinated military attack on Iran. This joint offensive – involving airstrikes, missiles, and other military assets – targeted strategic sites across Iran, including in Tehran and other major cities, and was described by the U.S. and Israeli officials as aimed at degrading Iran's nuclear and military capabilities and leadership. It was widely described by numerous global actors as escalatory and in violation of international law — Carney did not invoke the language of restraint he had championed in Davos. Instead, his government

affirmed support for the strikes under the familiar pretext of nuclear containment.

This reversal is not merely realpolitik. It is a rupture of credibility.

At Davos, Carney extolled a rules-based order grounded in sovereignty, human rights, and the sanctity of international law. Yet when those principles were tested by bombs falling on sovereign territory, his response was not principled opposition but calibrated alignment. He spoke of civilian protection while endorsing the very military campaign generating civilian peril. The rhetorical symmetry collapsed under the weight of events.

Such inconsistency cannot be dismissed as diplomatic nuance.

Where was the unambiguous outrage when schools and hospitals were reduced to rubble? When Gaza was starved of food and water and subjected to relentless, indiscriminate bombardment by Israeli forces, reduced in vast swathes to rubble and ruin. Entire neighbourhoods vanished beneath smoke and concrete, and a civilian population was left to endure devastation without refuge or reprieve. Reports from human rights monitors detail the deaths of schoolchildren, including scores of girls killed in airstrikes — children whose lives were extinguished in conflicts not of their making. If the protection of innocents is universal, it cannot be selective. It was declared a genocide by people of conscience around the world.

Carney once urged the world to summon moral clarity in defense of the vulnerable. That summons now echoes unanswered.

What emerges is a familiar pattern in Western foreign policy: principles articulated eloquently in global forums, then quietly subordinated when geopolitical alliances are at stake. One vocabulary for Davos; another for the battlefield. Values, it seems, are immutable only when they are cost-free.

This is not diplomacy. It is a moral equivocation.

If global applause were the measure of statesmanship, Davos would suffice. But leadership is not tested in conference halls; it is tested when power acts and a leader must decide whether to echo it or restrain it. A credible commitment to international law requires consistency — applying its standards to adversaries and allies alike.

To instead offer reflexive condemnation of Iran while muting outrage over documented excesses by Israel is not balanced. It is selective morality. It signals that some violations demand thunder, while others merit contextual footnotes.

Such a posture is profoundly un-Canadian.

For the most part, Canada's foreign policy has been staged from a moral high ground. Canada has not historically been a reflexive appendage to American militarism. When the drums of war thundered in 2003, it was Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who refused the call of George W. Bush to join the invasion of Iraq — a war later exposed as catastrophic and founded on false premises. Chrétien's historic words to Bush in the oval office: 'Show me the evidence' demonstrated that alliance does not mean obedience, and that moral clarity sometimes requires standing apart from

even one's closest partner. He was a bold, and intellectually assured statesman – guided by a quiet but unmistakable dignity.

That was leadership anchored in judgment, not proximity to power.

By contrast, Carney's stance projects compliance rather than conviction. To stand beside governments repeatedly accused by international bodies of disproportionate force — without equally forceful scrutiny — is not strategic sophistication. It is appeasement disguised as pragmatism.

If a rules-based order is to mean anything, it must bind friends as firmly as foes. Otherwise, it is reduced to rhetorical currency — applauded in Davos, abandoned in crisis.

Canada deserves better than performative principles. It deserves leadership with backbone — leadership willing to defend international law consistently, not conveniently. History does not remember those who echo power. It remembers those who resist it when conscience demands.

On that measure, the contrast is no longer subtle. It is stark. ■



Epstein Files in Cyrillic? We Knew It! – A Satirical Piece



LILY ONG

At long last, the West has finally arrived at the only logical conclusion: Russia is the master-mind behind the Epstein scandal! One must ask, whatever took them so long? It's so blindingly obvious that Jeffrey Epstein was never a mere financier but a KGB-trained "honey-trapper" sleeper agent recruited during the Brezhnev era to collect kompromat on Western elites with the cold, mechanical efficiency of a Lada assembly line.

Even the island's geography screams "Cyrillic." You see, before it was Little St. James, it was Koko Golden Beach—a classic, unsubtle Soviet nod to its KGB ownership. And those picturesque palm trees providing shade for his "shady" operations? Oh, please; those are actually "Russian Woodpeckers." Lean in closely and you will hear the 10Hz tapping noise—the kind that used to broadcast shortwave radio bands. Do not underestimate these bad boys, though; at up to 10 powerful megawatts, their signal can disrupt commercial aviation, amateur radio, and utility communications worldwide as they perform the twin duty of monitoring unwitting Western elites ashore to receive their doses of sun, sand, and state secrets.

Working harder than the swaying palms is the infamous blue-and-white temple. While the media refers to it innocently as a “gym,” we know the truth! This structure is, in fact, a direct satellite uplink to a Siberian dacha. It’s also powered entirely by an underground industrial-grade vodka distillery—the same kind that runs the beaming station at St. Basil Cathedral. In fact, it once had a golden dome too, but that was eventually removed in 2017 by a Russian-controlled weather event codenamed “Hurricane Maria.” Reports had it that the Kremlin thought its glare—visible from the International Space Station—would compromise their “covert” vibe.

But back to Epstein; he wasn’t just a spy but a psychological translator for Vladimir Putin. Had he not clued the Russian president in on the secret to negotiating with Donald Trump—specifically, identifying the exact brand of high-gloss hairspray required to survive a Baltic breeze—the Kremlin would never have managed to secure the Alaskan meeting. Through this lens, perhaps Americans should view Epstein as a misunderstood diplomat, merely expounding the finer points of gold-plated Manhattan sensibilities to an otherwise confused Vova.

So truth be told, the recently unsealed “Russian Files” are a treasure trove of devastating geopolitical secrets because Epstein didn’t just pass intel but risked everything to secure footage of a former prime minister double-dipping a shrimp at a 2016 gala. The nerve! The files also exposed Bill Gates’s clandestine preference for Netscape Navigator over Internet Explorer (IE)—information so damaging it could collapse the tech sector if released in the wrong Telegram channel!

Of course, Russia is a fair judge. They don’t believe everyone on

the island was a villain. For instance, the Kremlin's official stance is that Prince Andrew was at best a Class D chess player, so he was begging for Russian women only because he desperately needed seasoned chess tutors to coach him on aggressive openings. You know what they say: to seize the initiative, you must put your opponent on the back foot! Well, the Volga Gambit teaches exactly that, though the British tabloids seem to have misinterpreted the positions involved... Others, we assume, were merely there to jostle over the exclusive distributorship for furry ushanka hats. Perhaps we ought to give those entrepreneurial spirits a break.

As for the “lost” tapes, Russia seeks our collective empathy. The cameras used on the island were vintage Zenit-E Soviet film models. Due to Western sanctions, the special chemical developer required to process the film is currently stuck in a warehouse in Omsk. Putin has already ordered



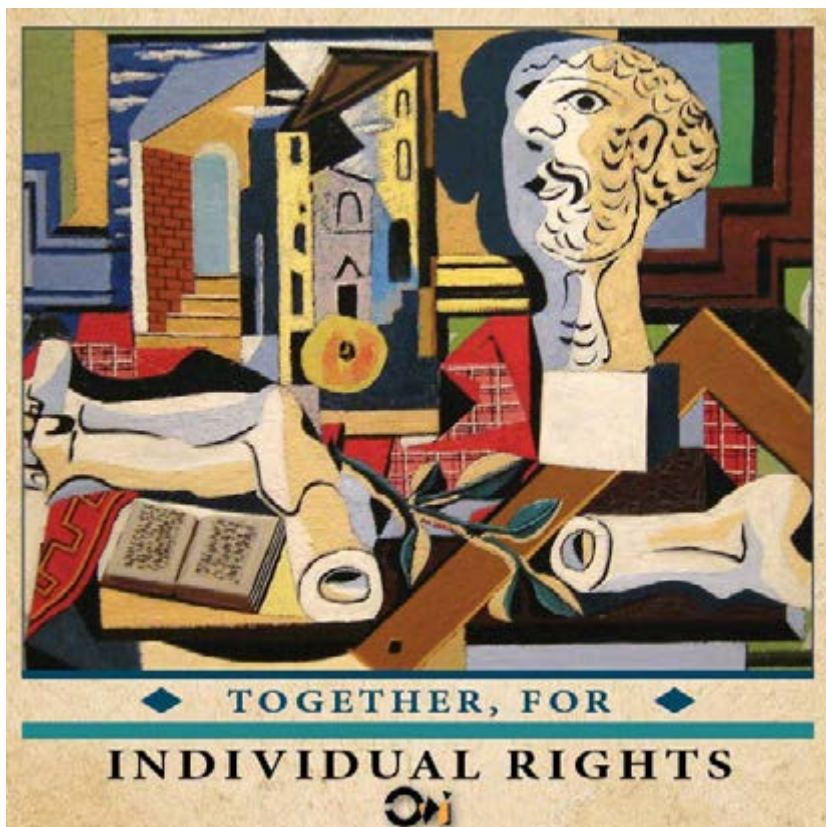
a nationwide search for 1980s darkroom equipment in cities that no longer appear on the map, but progress is regrettably slow due to the enduring bureaucracy. We can only hope that a technician named Boris didn't spill beet soup on the only working projector back in 2004. But know that if the footage turns up and appears grainy, it's a tragedy of Soviet maintenance, not conspiracy.

Ultimately though, Russia has given the West a great gift. In an era of extreme polarization, they have provided the one thing

every Western elite can agree on: no matter the scandal, it's definitely Putin's fault. This consensus alone is a diplomatic miracle. The West could, perhaps, be gracious—and let this one slide. ■



Lily Ong Born in Singapore but bred and buttered in the US, she's a linguistic assassin with zero chill. Performing public autopsies on the skulduggarious, she is the nightmare beneath their pillow. A rebel with a cause, she brings her pen and prayers to sword fights, tearing masks off slogans and drowning whistles of political piccolos. www.geopolitics360.net





**THERE
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OF
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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING
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NOW!**

The quiet exodus from the American dream



VIRGINIA ROBERTSON

For generations the United States stood as the ultimate destination, a place where ambition met opportunity, where reinvention was not just possible but expected. The “American Dream” was more than a slogan; it was a global promise. Yet today a subtle but undeniable shift is taking place. Increasing numbers of Americans are not arriving in search of that dream, they are leaving it behind.

This migration is not driven by a single political figure or one election cycle, even though the era of Donald Trump undeniably accelerated national divisions and forced many Americans to reassess their future. The deeper story stretches across three decades of transformation. The America many citizens grew up believing in feels increasingly distant from the reality they now inhabit.

The most immediate pressure is economic. The cost of living in major American cities has spiraled beyond recognition. Housing, once the cornerstone of middle-class stability, has become an exhausting financial battle. Rent consumes salaries. Home ownership, once an attainable

milestone, now feels like a luxury reserved for the wealthy or the lucky few who bought property decades earlier. Even professionals with solid careers, teachers, engineers, nurses, find themselves financially stretched in ways their parents never experienced.

Healthcare remains perhaps the most alarming symbol of this change. In the wealthiest nation on earth, illness can still mean bankruptcy. Americans carry a quiet fear that a medical emergency could undo years of work overnight. The absence of universal healthcare has created a psychological burden as heavy as the financial one. By contrast, many European countries offer systems that prioritize stability over profit, allowing citizens to live without calculating the price of survival.

Education, once America's proud export to the world, has also shifted. University degrees increasingly arrive alongside lifelong debt. Younger generations question whether higher education still guarantees upward mobility. Public schools struggle with inequality tied to geography and income, reinforcing divisions rather than dissolving them.

Social tensions add another layer to the departure. Political polarization has hardened everyday conversations into ideological battlegrounds. Crime anxiety, whether statistically consistent or amplified by perception, shapes how communities experience public space. Meanwhile, debates around race, identity and belonging have intensified, leaving many Americans exhausted by a culture of constant confrontation. For some, relocation to Europe represents not escape but relief, a chance to live in societies perceived as calmer, safer and less defined by permanent crisis.

Europe, of course, is no paradise. It carries its own economic struggles, bureaucratic frustrations and political uncertainties.

Yet many Americans arriving there speak less about perfection and more about balance. Walkable cities, accessible healthcare, public transportation and a slower rhythm of life create an appealing alternative. The attraction is not luxury but livability, a cozy apartment, reliable services, evenings that do not revolve around financial anxiety.

What makes this moment remarkable is its symbolism. For much of modern history, migration flowed toward America. Now, the current moves in both directions. The shift suggests not the collapse of the United States but a recalibration of expectations. Americans are no longer convinced that success must be pursued within national borders.

The American Dream has not disappeared; it has simply lost its monopoly on hope. As citizens pack their lives into suitcases bound for European towns and cities, they are not rejecting their homeland entirely. They are searching for something increasingly rare: stability, dignity, and the freedom to live without constant struggle. In doing so, they force a difficult question back home, when people begin leaving the dream what does that say about the dream itself? ■



Door to Thoughts
Ovi to Philosophy
Door to Journalism
Ovi to Politics
Door to Poetry
Ovi to Opinion
Door to History
Ovi to the Heart
Door to Unknown
Ovi to Wonder
Door to Imagination
Ovi to Tomorrow
Door to Science
Ovi to the Past
Door to Solitude
Ovi to Mystery
Door to Peace
Ovi to Nostalgia
Door to Music
Ovi to Art
Door to Dance
Ovi to Infinity
Door to the Void
Ovi to the Soul
Door to Courage
Ovi to Grief
Door to Joy
Ovi to Understanding
Door to the Truth
Ovi to a Dream
Door to Adventure
Ovi to Midnight
Door to Starlight
Ovi to Hope
Door to Shadows
Ovi to Whispers
Door to Labyrinth
Ovi to Lost
Door to Lost Found
Ovi to Elsewhere
Ovi to Cinema
Door to Theatre
Ovi to Education



OVI MEANS “DOOR” IN FINNISH.

The Kleosthenis Road 2026



THE ROUTE OF TRUCE

In the sacred lands of the Peloponnese, where the ancient Olympic flame once burned, a new tradition is set to unite past and present. “The Kleosthenis Road 2026”, a 5km road race organized by the NGO “the Route of Truce,” will invite runners to follow in the footsteps of kings on Saturday, May 9, 2026. This event is not merely a competitive race; it is a tribute to Kleosthenis, the king of Ancient Pisa and a living re-enactment of the values he helped enshrine centuries ago.



The route itself is a journey through history. Starting from the Church of Agia Kyriaki in Ancient Pisa, participants will pass by the Tombs of the Hellanodikai,

the judges of the ancient Games, run in front of the International Olympic Academy and the ancient Stadium of Olympia, before finishing at the old town hall of Ancient Olympia. It is a route that connects the heartbeat of modern runners with the spirits of athletes who once competed for an olive wreath and eternal glory.

This race is dedicated to Kleosthenis, the king of Pisa, who, alongside Iphitus of Elis and the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus, signed the first Olympic Truce, or 'Ekecheiria'. According to ancient tradition, these three leaders heeding an oracle from Delphi agreed to halt the incessant wars that plagued the Greek city-states to found a peaceful sporting competition. The truce declared the sacred site of Olympia inviolable and guaranteed safe passage for athletes, artists and spectators travelling to and from the Games. Contrary to popular belief, this was not a universal cessation of all wars but rather a sacred guarantee of safe conduct and a prohibition against invading Elis, the region hosting the Games. This agreement, inscribed on a bronze discus kept in the Temple of Hera, transformed the Olympics from a local festival into a Pan-Hellenic institution of unparalleled prestige.

In our contemporary world, fractured by conflict and division, the spirit of the Olympic Truce is more relevant than ever. Revived by the International Olympic Committee in the early 1990s and supported by the United Nations since 1993, the modern Truce aims to harness the power of sport to promote dialogue and reconciliation. While the ancient version protected travellers, the modern initiative is a moral call for peace, urging nations to observe a cessation of hostilities during the Games. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently stated, the Olympics are "an excellent moment to symbolize peace, to symbolize respect for international law, and to symbolize international cooperation".

Though the track record of the modern truce is mixed, famously broken by invasions during past Olympic periods, its symbolic power remains immense. It has inspired moments of unity, such as when North and South Korea marched together at the Sydney 2000 opening ceremony. The values learned on the field, fairness, courage and teamwork, are the same values needed to build a more peaceful and inclusive world.

The Kleosthenis Road 2026 embodies this enduring hope. By running this 5km route, participants are not just testing their athletic mettle; they are becoming ambassadors for peace, walking the same path as the ancient judges and honouring a pact made nearly three millennia ago. It is a powerful reminder that even in an age of division, humanity can still find common ground through sport. The race is a call to action, inviting us to carry the torch of the ‘Ekecheiria’ into the future, proving that the road to peace, much like the road to Olympia, is a journey worth taking together. Join us [HERE!](#)

* * * * *

The “Federation of Olympia” is reviving an ancient mountain path connecting Ancient Ilida to Olympia, creating the 50-kilometer “Eco-touristic Route Ilida – Olympia: The Route of Truce.” Inspired by Pausanias, the route passes through 13 villages in Ilia, many fire-affected, linking the host city of the ancient Games to the sacred sanctuary. The project serves a dual purpose: to offer visitors an eco-touristic and cultural journey through olive groves and vineyards while promoting local products for regional development. More profoundly, it aims to bridge ancient and modern times by reviving the ideals of the Olympic Truce, respect, peace and democracy. With Hellenism as its core, the route aspires to remind humanity of the sacred right to peace and reconciliation among nations. ■



Explore

Route of Truce

To build a bridge between the ancient and the modern



The ecotourism route from Ilis to Olympia, known as the "Route of Truce", invites the visitor to walk along two exceptional archaeological sites that gave birth to the Olympic Games that stir the imagination of Ilis and Olympia. A place where legends were born; like the raising of infant Zeus in the hands of Amalthea, the athletic events among the Olympian gods or Hercules' labours.



Manish Zodiac Predictions for March 2026



MANISH KUMAR ARORA

Aries (21 March – 19 April) - It's an exciting month ahead—one in which you receive rewards for what you do best. Career success, increased recognition for your talents and efforts, and a focus on close personal partnerships is what this month is about for you. Imaginative undertakings could boost your income. Strengthening close ties with a special someone is likely. However, excessive self-interest and wilfulness can undermine your close personal relationships—and can actually work against your better interests. If involved in a casual love relationship, pressure emerges concerning the need for evaluating your commitments. **Favorable Dates: March 1, 5, 10, 14, 19, 23** **Favorable Colors – Yellow & Green**

Taurus (20 April – 20 May) - This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. There could be a promotion, new job opportunities, a diploma or other form of major award, or possibly even a marriage. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider audience is possible during this cycle. Your worldly status may change for the better. Relationships are seen now as serious matters. Partners are no longer simply for amusement or mirrors of your ego. You may take special joy in sharing ideals, a common cause, or a sense of belonging with others. **Favorable Dates: March 4, 5, 13, 14, 22, 23** **Favorable Colors – Blue & Green**

Gemini (21 May – 20 June) – This period brings subtle changes to your value system. Some of you are moving towards a less materialistic value system, and others may be encountering unexpected circumstances that bring about a fluctuating or uncertain income. You will eliminate some deep-seated habits and attachments that have been keeping you back from feeling emotionally free. Your hunches, compassion, and intuition, in fact, can support and further your professional goals. A spirit of friendship is brought to an existing close partnership. You emerge healthier and stronger by the end of the month. **Favorable Dates: March 1, 5, 10, 14, 19, 23 Favorable Colors – Brown & White**

Cancer (21 June – 22 July) - You are called upon to take stock of your abilities. Increased responsibilities are likely. A deep faith that everything will work out is with you now. This is a time when you can rid yourself of self-destructive tendencies. You'll be building your resources, getting your finances straightened out, and learning a great deal about the people around you. This cycle also brings a certain measure of spiritual protection and enhancement. There may be unexpected events that free you from confining situations or past conditioning patterns. **Favorable Dates: March 1, 8, 10, 17, 19, 26 Favorable Colors – Red & Blue**

Leo (23 July – 22 August) - Your own awesome strength and faith is always there to draw upon this month. You could be working on a project in solitude or behind the scenes, and when you do come out with it, it could be quite profitable. You may have been facing difficulties satisfying your libido and encountering problems with intimacy. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. This is a time when you need to define, understand and crystallize your significant relationships with others. **Favorable Dates: March 3, 4, 12, 13, 21, 22 Favorable Colors – Red & White**

Virgo (23 August – 22 September) -Your dreaming world is especially rich, lighter, helpful, and more intuitive. Meditation and retreats may be particularly beneficial to you now, acting to regenerate and invigorate you. Determination to go after what you want is backed by an increasing feeling of hope, optimism and spiritual protection. You may make little changes to your personal appearance or to your mannerisms that reflect the changes going on inside. A desire to live in a more free-spirited manner is with you this month. You are likely to experience events that highlight the necessity to share and trust **Favorable Dates: March 3, 7, 12, 16, 21, 25 Favorable Colors –Yellow & White**

Libra (23 September – 22 October) - You are likely to make changes in your life that break you out of your usual routines. Recognition for what you do and what you're naturally good at comes your way this month. New opportunities to express yourself, particularly through speaking and writing, can suddenly enter your life. You may be communicating more about your past or finding people to relate with more readily. If involved in a casual love relationship, a pressure emerges concerning the need for evaluating your commitments. Excessive self-interest and wilfulness can undermine your close personal relationships. **Favorable Dates: March 2, 5, 11, 14, 20, 23 Favorable Colors –Red & Green**

Scorpio (23 October – 21 November) - This period in your life is a time for building a solid foundation. A close partnership could be a strong source of intellectual companionship this month. You may be working together towards shared long-term goals, or you could take on a business partner who helps you to realize some of your most treasured wishes. You may take special joy in sharing ideals, a common cause, or a sense of belonging with others. Moderation at this point in your life is necessary for your spiritual growth and your physical body as well. **Favorable Dates: March 1, 5, 10, 14, 19, 23 Favorable Colors – Red &White**

Sagittarius (22 November -21 December) – This is a power period for you when you could uncover awesome opportunities that were previously hidden or that you were not aware of. You are also inclined to take a few more risks with your finances, or unusual ways of making money could be in place during this cycle. Some form of reward may be offered to you now. The urge to expand and pursue your worldly goals is great, but you are also intent on a certain level of freedom to explore life. **Favorable Dates: March 2, 4, 11, 13, 20, 22 Favorable Colors – Red & Yellow**

Capricorn (22 December – 19 January) – You may receive a cosmic push towards expressing yourself more creatively and experience an increased drive to take charge of your life. Issues surrounding your personal appearance, your body, and your image become especially important. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider audience is possible during this cycle. Your worldly status may change for the better. Your own determination to succeed and your long-term vision could be qualities that attract a serious partnership or that enhance an existing one. A spirit of friendship, freedom, and acceptance could be present in a partnership. **Favorable Dates: March 2, 5, 11, 14, 20, 23 Favorable Colors – Purple & White**

Aquarius (20 January – 18 February) - You will feel considerably more emotionally healthy. You will have nixed some of your addictions, and mastered your superstitions. You will feel more powerful because you have given up attempting to control things you cannot and you will gain a feeling of self-mastery instead. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to better your health and well-being, such as regular exercise and more productive use of your time. Transformative partnerships pull you to adjust your values and define what your need to be truly happy from the inside out. **Favorable Dates: March 1, 3, 10, 12, 19, 21 Favorable Colors – Grey & White**

Pisces (19 February – 20 March) - You are more able to get in touch with your subconscious mind. Charity, giving anonymously, volunteering, and helping others without expectation of reward will be most satisfying during this cycle. Work that involves serving others may begin now and bring you much joy. You are also learning about the comfort levels of others. Essentially, you are learning to share and to surrender yourself (in a balanced manner!) to intimacy. Get in touch with what feels most comfortable for you, and the intimacy level in your relationship will step up a notch. **Favorable Dates: March 3, 4, 12, 13, 21 22**
Favorable Colors – Red & Green. ■





Keep nature a current reality,
not in a **future** childhood fishbowl!

poetry/fiction



Prayer



DAVID SPARENBERG

because I love life
genuinely
love the adventure of being alive
I must oppose you

you the enemy of life
destroyer of lives
you the betrayer

I need my love to be
free from politics
free from political rancor
deliberate chaos
and partisan animosity

I pray
to never again hear
the sound of your delusional voice

to no more see
the ugliness of your hateful face
not to be pressed beneath
the heavy threat of your shadow
not to dread
the venomous nightmare
of your vengeful mind
never more, never more haunted
by the corpse of your heart
and the cold spite you exploit
to squeeze the life out of life

I will not empower
not recognize
or ever more pollute
life's precious time and focus
falling into the
grasp in your perfidious madness

because I love life love
the adventure of life
and life itself is freedom
I must oppose you

you who are
freedom's enemy
you destroyer of lives
you the betrayer

because my dignity
requires integrity
because there is freedom

in integrity
and dignity and integrity
are strangers to you

I pray
to be scrubbed clean
of the stain of your corruption
to be purged
and morally liberated
from the stigma of your crimes

I need to reclaim
the simplicity of joy
to return
to the pursuit of happiness
realign
with the generosity of connectivity
to reconnect
within the wealth of friendships
and the good feelings
of honestly shared and amicable
relationships

I turn my back on
what you are
on resentment and your playbook
of plots and lies
I walk away
walk far, far away
I will not hear you more
I will not see you longer
will never concede

to give what you believe is
yours to take to
waste and to ruin

I pray now and forever
everywhere where
a face is where a voice is
and always
I'll forget your name
you are nobody
I'll wash away
your unclean memory
with the gentle
cleansing rain of mercy

so
to love life
to be a person in
love not the thing
the shameful loveless thing
you sought to make of me

I pray
and will go on – go on and on and on
good enough – great enough lovingly
without you



The doorway



ABIGAIL GEORGE

I make toast
with peanut butter

for you
it's important

there are many
things that are important

these days
the light

in this room
for one thing

for another
the fact that you're

awake
that I'm in the kitchen

making you
a late breakfast

Digging
Digging
Digging

While they dig
Yes, while those cancer cells dig, chip

anchoring away

I eat the sun
It drips down my chin

While the dog barks
Yes, while the dog barks

You're quiet
So, so quiet

Into the loathed
strangeness of cancer

They curl then dance, curl
and dance away into mitochondria

Into the strangeness
of tissues and organs

the groaning of the body
its atoms

all of its dimensions

Into the holistic awareness
of those cells

Daddy, I hope
these berries heal you

Take this
and accept this mug

of green tea
this offering,

this machine

My love is like
ginger and honey, these bees' rage
will nourish you

The ginger
will behave

like ointment, honey a salve
a balm

I keep meeting
your gaze in maps

Drinking in the fear
and anguish in your eyes

You see, it matches my own.
It matches my own

The doorway becomes
a passage, nobody sees my tears.

And you, dad,
becomes a new creation

While the machine performs a scan
on you

I am frozen
You're a sphere

A flat grassland
The back of my hand

Neverland
One day you're never

Coming back to me
You won't be walking

through the front door
The grief and longing here

how sweet you are
how faithful

Never leave daddy
Never leave me, my beloved

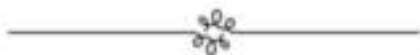
Strange bones
What strange love this is

A daughter's love

To optimism and hope
For its appearance in my life

This is me remembering you
And for the memories

All the memories
That you will leave behind.

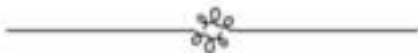


Dantean World



NIKOS LAIOS

They descended down
Through the levels,
They walked past
Death and doom,
Eternal torments,
Famine and greed,
Violence and war,
Hunger and despair,
While the privileged few
In London, New York,
Sydney and Milan
Marched with full bellies
And selective rage
Protesting causes
In foreign lands;
While the forgotten poor
Of the world continued
Their descent through
The levels of their
Own Dantean world.





*His future existence
depends on your
present presence.*



The silence between us



LENI KORHONEN

The house had become too quiet since Lily stopped speaking, but not the kind of quiet that brings peace. It was the sharp kind, the kind that pressed on Daniel's ears like altitude, like the air had turned thin. Grief had settled in the corners, in the carpet fibers, in the uneven hum of the refrigerator. It was everywhere except in his daughter's voice, which had vanished the day her mother died.

Lily was seven. She had always been precocious, too smart, Daniel sometimes said to Maria when they lay in bed in the bluish light of the television. "She's going to see through all of us," he'd whispered once, and Maria had laughed her sleepy laugh. That laugh had disappeared too, now just another ghost in the walls.

The morning Maria didn't wake up, Lily had gone to wake her for pancakes. Daniel was in the shower. He had left the radio on, something acoustic, something Maria would hum to when she made the coffee. When he stepped out, wrapped in a towel, he heard a strange silence. That was the beginning.

He found Lily sitting on the edge of the bed, her small hand on Maria's wrist, waiting. Her face was calm in the way that only children's faces can be when they do not yet understand the finality of things.

"Daddy," she said once, just once, when he lifted her away from the bed.

She had not spoken again.

* * * * *

At first, they called it "selective mutism." The child psychologist, a woman with tiny hands and a necklace made of smooth stones, said that trauma expressed itself in odd ways in children. "She's choosing not to speak," the woman said, "because she's trying to make sense of a world that no longer fits."

Daniel wanted to scream that it wasn't a choice. That she wanted to speak, that he could see it in the way her lips twitched when he read to her at night, in the way her eyes darted as if she was looking for a place where her voice might still be hiding. But he didn't scream. Instead, he nodded and asked if there was something he could do.

"Routine," the psychologist said. "Routine and patience."

He built a routine so solid it could've been charted like a train schedule. Wake at 7. Breakfast at 7:15. Drive to school with the same playlist Maria used to love. Pick-up at 2:45. Quiet hour. Dinner at 6. Reading at 8. Lights out at 8:30.

Lily didn't resist. But she didn't respond, either. She went through the motions like a child-shaped ghost, polite and silent.

Daniel had not cried, not at the funeral, not in the quiet weeks after, not even when he found Maria's sweater in the laundry and held it to his face for twenty minutes. His grief was a slow-dripping faucet, enough to notice, never enough to stop.

But Lily's silence broke him in places Maria's death had only cracked.

He tried everything. He bought a golden retriever and named it Clementine, thinking maybe a dog would coax out her laughter, her voice, her spirit. But Lily only patted the dog gently, as if she were touching something distant. He cooked elaborate dinners, as Maria once had—handmade ravioli, honey-roasted chicken, her favorite tomato soup with grilled cheese—but Lily ate in silence, never refusing, never smiling.

She would draw, though. Dozens of drawings, all with the same small signature: a stick figure with long dark hair (Maria), another with a beard (Daniel), and a little girl. Sometimes the girl stood between the adults. Sometimes she stood alone.

In November, he found a drawing of just two stick figures, Maria and Lily, holding hands. He was nowhere to be found. He stared at the drawing for a long time before folding it into his wallet like a secret.

They went to the beach for Christmas.

Maria had always insisted that sand and saltwater healed more than doctors. Daniel packed up the car with towels and sunscreen

and a tiny Christmas tree Lily had decorated with her hands, silent but careful. He booked a cottage, a small place with peeling blue shutters and a sagging deck.

On the third day, Lily wandered down the shore and didn't come back.

Panic set in like a wave, swift, breathless. Daniel ran, yelling her name, his voice raw. The beach was mostly empty. He ran to a life-guard, who called others. A small search began. Daniel thought he might die from the weight in his chest.

And then, just as the sun dropped toward the ocean, Lily came walking back. Calm. Barefoot. Holding a single seashell.

She didn't speak. But she placed the shell in his hand and looked at him in a way that made Daniel feel both saved and utterly lost.

He squeezed the shell. It was warm.

* * * * *

One night, he heard a sound from Lily's room. Not words, but a whimper, like a dream had broken through her silence. He rushed in, heart beating hard. She was asleep, curled in the blue sheets with her hand on Clementine's back.

In the faint light from the hallway, he watched her chest rise and fall. He wanted to wake her, to ask her what she had dreamed, to beg her to speak. But he didn't.

He sat on the floor and whispered a story instead, one Maria had told her once, about a girl who found her voice in the roots of an old oak tree. He whispered until his voice cracked, until the hallway light flickered out.

Spring came. Lily's drawings changed. Now, the stick figures had speech bubbles. Daniel's said, "I love you." Maria's said, "I miss you." The girl never spoke.

Then, one day, Lily fell ill.

It started with a fever. Then a cough. The doctor said it was just a virus. But Lily grew weaker. Pale. Quiet in a new way.

She stopped drawing.

She stopped eating much.

Daniel sat by her bed for hours, reading her stories. Some nights, he played Maria's favorite songs on the guitar she used to strum badly but joyfully.

One night, as the sky turned indigo and the stars winked through the blinds, Lily opened her eyes.

He was holding her hand. It felt like holding paper.

She looked at him, so clearly, so deeply, that he forgot to breathe.

And then, finally, her lips parted.

"Daddy," she whispered.

The word was soft. Like a sigh. Like a leaf falling.

He sat up. "Lily?"

But her eyes had already closed again.

* * * * *

At the funeral, Daniel brought the seashell Lily had given him. He placed it in the earth beside her, along with one of her last drawings. In this one, the stick girl was in the sky, above the others, with lines that looked like music notes drawn from her mouth.

He didn't say anything.

There were no words.

Only the quiet.

But in that quiet, something stirred, like the beginning of a new story, or the ghost of a voice once lost.

And Daniel, broken open and left behind, listened.

The End



art



Late Picasso



MODERNA MUSEET
STOCKHOLM - SWEDEN

The latter part of Pablo Picasso's career burns with restless intensity. The exhibition "Late Picasso" presents around fifty works created between 1963 and 1972 – works once overlooked but now recognized as a powerful premonition of future artistic expression.

Initially overlooked, Picasso's late works gained new renewed significance in the 1980s. As painting re-



emerged as a dominant medium, a younger generation of artists found inspiration in the expressive freedom of his final decade. Today, they are recognized not only as ground-breaking, but also as a powerful premonition of the artistic expression of later generations.

Until April 5, 2026

Extreme Tension



NEUE NATIONALGALERIE
BERLIN - GERMANY

The art of the second half of the twentieth century is marked by an enormous diversity of materials, mediums, and methods. At the same time, hardly another era was so characterized by division, rupture, and transformation as the period after the Second World War. In light of this, the Neue Nationalgalerie has chosen the title *Extreme Tension* for the upcoming presentation of its postwar collection.



Until April 25, 2027

Nigerian Modernism



TATE MODERN
LONDON - UK

Set against the backdrop of cultural and artistic rebellion, Nigerian Modernism celebrates the achievements of Nigerian artists working before and after the decade of national independence from British colonial rule in 1960.

Nigerian Modernism tells the story of artistic networks which spanned Zaria, Ibadan, Lagos and Enugu, as well as London, Munich and Paris.

Through groups like the Zaria Art Society and Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club, they fused Nigerian, African and European techniques and traditions to create vibrant, multidimensional works.



Until May 10, 2026

Multiple Self-portraits

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
TOKYO - JAPAN

2025 marked 30 years of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. The MOT collection now consists of approximately 6000 works ranging from modern to contemporary, with an emphasis on postwar art. This exhibition is made up of two displays that shed light on the endeavors of artists in the collection, primarily focusing on recently added works.

Until April 2, 2026



March 2026



AN ON TO ART

** Ovi in Finnish means door*

The exile of imagination



THANOS KALAMIDAS

In our era of tightening ideological borders, art increasingly resembles a hunted refugee, restless, displaced and perpetually searching for safe passage. The forces pressing in on creative expression do not always announce themselves with uniforms or decrees. Often they arrive disguised as protection, morality, patriotism or even “common sense.” Yet the effect remains the same, the narrowing of imagination’s breathing room.

Far-right prejudice thrives on simplicity. It prefers fixed identities, fixed histories and fixed truths. Art by contrast is inherently unruly. It refuses singular narratives. It insists on ambiguity, contradiction and emotional complexity. This alone makes it suspect to movements built upon rigid cultural hierarchies. When political ideology demands purity, art becomes contamination.

The censorship of art today rarely resembles the dramatic bonfires of history. Instead, it operates through quieter mechanisms, funding withdrawn, exhibitions cancelled, books quietly removed from curricula, artists pressured into silence through public intimidation. The

modern censor understands that suppression works best when it appears administrative rather than authoritarian. No need to ban a painting outright if you can simply make it impossible to display.

What distinguishes this moment is not merely restriction but the normalization of restriction. Cultural gatekeeping has become framed as defence, defence of tradition, of national identity, of imagined moral order. The artist, once romanticized as a national treasure, is increasingly portrayed as an outsider, even an enemy. Creativity is tolerated only when it reassures rather than questions.

History teaches us that art has always lived under threat. From authoritarian regimes to moral panics, creativity has repeatedly been cast as dangerous precisely because it unsettles certainty. A poem can destabilize propaganda more effectively than a speech. A novel can humanize those whom politics seeks to dehumanize. A painting can remind viewers that reality contains more shades than ideology allows.



What feels different now is the global simultaneity of pressure. Through digital platforms, outrage travels faster than reflection. A single controversial image can ignite campaigns demanding removal before discussion has even begun. Artists face not only institutional scrutiny but perpetual surveillance by an audience

trained to interpret offense as injury and dissent as betrayal. The result is self-censorship, a silent editing of thought before creation even begins.

When artists anticipate punishment, imagination shrinks. Risk disappears. Culture becomes safe, repetitive ...marketable. Art loses its capacity to surprise us, to disturb us into empathy. We are left with decoration rather than revelation.

And yet art persists. It migrates. When galleries close doors, artists move to underground spaces, independent publications or digital margins. Creativity adapts the way refugees do: carrying fragments of identity across hostile terrain. The resilience of art lies not in institutional approval but in its stubborn human necessity. People continue to create because expression is not luxury; it is survival.

The tragedy of censorship is not merely what artists lose but what society forfeits. Without artistic dissent, public life grows intellectually malnourished. Democracies require discomfort to remain alive. Art provides that discomfort, asking questions politics cannot answer honestly.

If art today resembles a refugee, the responsibility falls on audiences, readers, and citizens to become its sanctuary. The defence of creative freedom is not an abstract cultural issue; it is a measure of how much uncertainty a society can tolerate. And uncertainty, inconvenient as it may be, is where freedom begins.



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Urban Fractures

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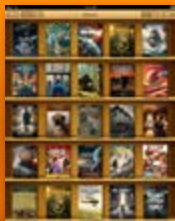
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